

Translation Style of Louisa M. Alcott's Novel *Little Women* with Specific Reference to Cultural Items

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to conduct a comparative study of translation of Louisa M. Alcott's *Little Women* with regards to Nida's Dynamic Equivalence and the acceptability in the target text. This paper seeks to investigate the cultural aspects of the text such as ecology, material culture, social culture, religious culture, plus linguistic culture. Whether these are preserved or omitted in the target texts. The researcher grouped (10) samples from the English version and the Arabic translations of the novel *Little Women*. A qualitative method design is assumed in this research scope. The samples are chosen based on comparison between the languages under question. These samples are investigated (for acceptability) in a qualitative manner. The evaluation shows that some samples were crucial as they were able to maintain the cultural meaning. While others were culturally inadequate to varying degrees.

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Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature on literary translation by examining cultural-specific items in Arabic translations of *Little Women*. This study is one of very few studies which have investigated acceptability and adequacy in English-to-Arabic translation. The paper's primary contribution is finding that domestication and neutralization strategies dominate translators' cultural choices.

1. Introduction

As we move away from traditional models, it becomes essential to adopt a more inclusive perspective that recognizes the diverse cultural identities engaged in translation (Bassnett 1998). Thought leaders like Bassnett and Snell-Hornby encourage us to reevaluate our translation practices, advocating for the establishment of translation studies as a distinct academic field, separate from linguistics and comparative literature. Snell Horenby (2006) states that translation is not merely a

linguistic endeavor; it is a nuanced interaction between two languages and their respective cultural legacies. According to Toury (2012) translators face the complex challenge of navigating the cultural attributes unique to the source text. This demands a deep understanding of various elements (including lexical choices, syntactic structures, and cultural ideologies) all of which must be considered with care to convey the essence of the original work in a manner that resonates within the target language. Moreover, scholars such as Berman (1995) emphasizes the critical role of translation criticism. Positive critique is not only advantageous; it is vital for understanding the depth and quality of translations. Reiss (2000), in particular, underscores the need for translators to meticulously analyze the linguistic features of the source text to create optimal equivalents in the target language.

The study examines three Arabic translations of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* by Amina Saeed. It evaluates the faithfulness of the translation, addressing cultural shifts and ideological influences. Zhang (2019) praises the novel's emotional depth, while Islam (2021) sees it as a reflection of 19th-century feminism. This study reveals how two languages adhere differences and similarities in translating literary texts. The study examines different types of interpretations in the translated versions. Literary translation is available in a vast range, such as poetry, drama, prose fiction. These types of literary translations should be transmitted well to the target readers in terms of highly prepared, and competence in a way that prevents misunderstanding or oblique. In other words, translations should include the culture of the receptor. Miles (2020) and HaloHalo33 (2022) affirm its enduring cultural impact. Using Nida's theory, the study assesses whether these translations maintain the original text's spirit and its relationship with readers

1. 2. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Identify culture-specific items in *Little Women* according to Nida's cultural categories.
- ii. Analyze the translation strategies used in three Arabic translations.
- iii. Examine the impact of these strategies on translation acceptability and adequacy

2. Literature Review

2.1. Culture-Specific Items

This section attempts to contextualize the existing studies on cultural differences between Arab and English cultures. Saldanha and O'Brien's (2014, 11) report to solve the challenges of literary translation without distorting the ST, experts and scholars always take models into consideration. A framework is a collection of concepts and methods for observing and learning about a specific field. The paper gives a thorough summary of several studies that examine the difficulties and nuances of translating literary works, with an emphasis on the linguistic and cultural divide between Arabic and English. Here is an overview of the main ideas from the papers that were covered:

In her 1995 study, Lataiwish (1995) explores the linguistic and cultural difficulties that translators have when translating Arabic short stories into English. The main problem is the cultural differences between Arabic and English readers, which have an impact on the text's emotional and conceptual aspects. Due to a lack of exposure to the target

language, the study finds that students translating these stories frequently have trouble with word collocations, idioms, and choosing suitable lexical equivalents. The study emphasizes the importance of cultural context in translating and the difficulties in conveying culturally specific concepts and pictures that may not be accessible in English. The translation of cultural references from Syrian literature into other languages is the subject of Tanjour's (2010) research, which also looks at how target audiences respond to these translations. The study uses cultural analysis of two Arabic versions of *The Virgin and the Gipsy* and interviews with Syrian publishers. Tanjour analyzes cultural objects using Newmark's adaptation of Nida's model and Leppihalme's classification of culture-oriented problems into extralinguistic and intralinguistic categories. The study comes to the conclusion that overcoming cultural obstacles in translation requires a grasp of the literary genre and cultural context.

Alshammari (2015) approaches Nida's theory of formal and dynamic equivalence in translating Arabic proverbs into English. The study parallels the translation of 20 Arabic proverbs using both formal and dynamic equivalence methods. The findings indicate that although both approaches can partially translate Arabic proverbs, cultural and belief losses are unavoidable. According to Alshammari, formal equivalent protects the culture of the source language but runs the risk of misunderstanding, whereas dynamic equivalence makes communication in the target language easier. According to the study, cultural issues in translation should not be restricted to belief loss but rather should be considered holistically.

Al Bisher (2016) considers the translation of cultural expressions in children's literature from English into Arabic, utilizing *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as a case study. The research emphasizes the challenges that translators face in selecting accurate cultural equivalents in the TTs. Al Bisher implies that translators should employ specific strategies to seized cultural equivalence challenges, such as Klingberg's theory of translation. The study underlines the importance of adapting texts to the cultural and cognitive levels of young readers.

According to Sultan's (2016) study Mohammed Khudayyir's *Basrayatha* was translated from Arabic into English utilizing the insider/outsider method. The study examines how cultural components are portrayed in the target text using Pike's etic vs. emic linguistic theory. The results show that although the translator effectively captures the original meaning of the source text, they fall short in comprehending the text's cultural and historical background. Sultan contends that attaining cultural equivalency requires more than just linguistic ability; translators also need to take the source text's history, culture, and religion into account.

In this study, Maatoq (2019) looks at how five translators from various theological and cultural backgrounds translated Surat-At-Taqwir from the Quran. The study gathers information on readers' cultural background-based translation choices via a questionnaire. Maatoq comes to the conclusion that readers are more likely to prefer translations that reflect their cultural and religious views. The study emphasizes how crucial it is to translate religious texts while taking the reader's and translator's cultural backgrounds into account.

Mosa's (2019) study, (which employs Rajaa Alsanea's *Girls of Riyadh* as its source material) focuses on self-translation. The research examines how self-translators can serve as a bridge between two cultures but also notes that some self-translators may

delete or alter cultural elements in the translation process. Mosa (2019) argues that self-translators should strive to convey not only the linguistic content but also the cultural and literary merits of the source text. The study critiques the English translation of *Girls of Riyadh* for omitting Qur'anic verses, poems, and proverbs, which are integral to the cultural context of the original work.

Obiedat (2021) examines how cultural collocations are translated in Naguib Mahfouz's book (*Awlad Haritna*). The study uses Venuti's concepts of domestication and foreignization, Newmark's classifications of cultural expressions, and House's model of Translation Quality Assessment to examine how cultural collocations are translated. According to the study, the majority of cultural collocations are tamed to conform to the culture of the target text, which causes discrepancies between the source and target texts. Obiedat stresses that in order to increase translation quality, it is critical to comprehend cultural nuances and collocational meaning.

Out of the previous studies, they collectively highlight the following key perspectives:

- i. Cultural Differences: The primary challenge in translating between Arabic and English lies in the cultural differences that affect the conceptual and emotional dimensions of the text.
- ii. Linguistic Challenges: Translators often struggle with word collocations, idioms, and selecting appropriate lexical counterparts due to insufficient exposure to the target language.
- iii. Translation Strategies: Various strategies, such as formal and dynamic equivalence, domestication, and foreignization, are employed to bridge cultural and linguistic gaps.
- iv. Reader Response: The cultural and religious backgrounds of both translators and readers significantly influence the reception and interpretation of translated texts.
- v. Self-Translation: Self-translators have the unique ability to convey the cultural and literary merits of the source text but may also alter or omit cultural elements in the translation process.

In brief, the studies underscore the complexity of literary translation, particularly when dealing with culturally specific texts. They emphasize the need for translators to have a deep understanding of both the source and target cultures, as well as the linguistic nuances of both languages, to produce accurate and culturally resonant translations.

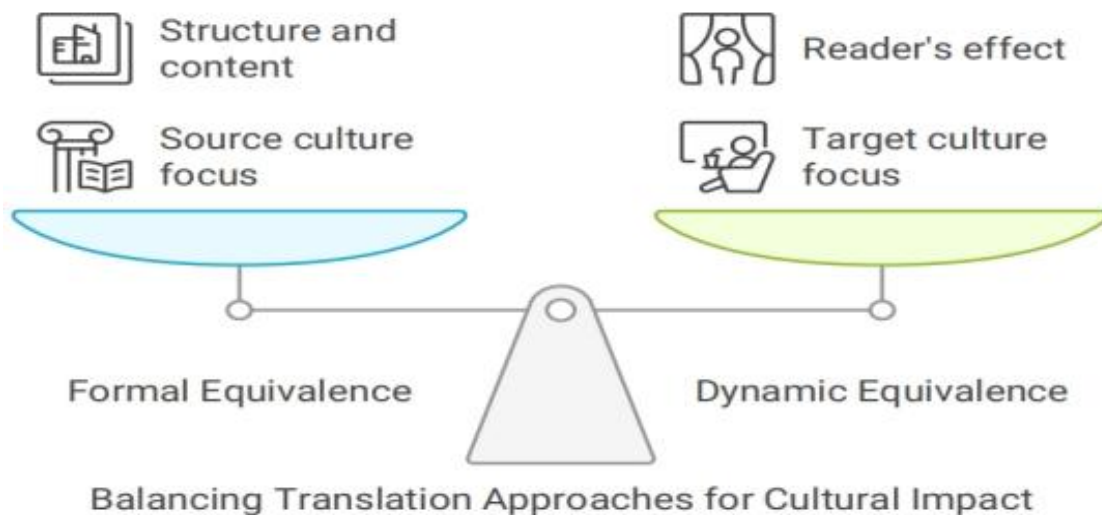
This study's focus differs from the constantly expanding corpus of comparative studies research, which is currently of utmost relevance. Because there are so many Arabic translations that surpass those of the Islamic world, it is likely that little effort has been done on translating English literary texts. There is evidence of these similar activities in Toury's (2012) publications, where he argues that it is acceptable to assume that acceptability and adequacy can be evaluated using the cultural qualities that are available. From these unquestionably realized facts, one may start to make the case that there is room for conducting research on the balance between acceptability and adequacy in contrastive cultural analysis of literary translations between Arabic and English. Nida's model of translation along with these cultural features will be a perfect support for this study.

The "equivalent effect" is the foundation of dynamic equivalence (the receptor-oriented approach), in which the relationship between the SL and message receptor is identical to that between the TL reader and message. Nida stresses the importance of an

expression's naturalness. Therefore, to gain naturalness, the message must be tailored to the linguistic requirements and cultural expectations of the recipient. The goal of naturalness is to adapt semantic features and cultural references together. (Nida, 1964).

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual tension at the heart of translation practice, using a balance scale to represent the two major approaches theorized by Eugene Nida: Formal Equivalence and Dynamic Equivalence. Formal Equivalence focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content, keeping the structure and wording as close as possible to the source text and its originating culture. However, Dynamic Equivalence, by contrast, shifts the priority toward the reader, emphasizing the target culture and the effect the translation produces on its audience. A translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of their own culture.

Figure 1: Balancing between Translation approaches for cultural aspects Nida (2015)



Nida (2015) argues that words signify cultural behaviors. To translate efficiently, the cultural background of both languages must therefore be understood, and phrases with adjacent meanings must be used. It is possible to have a better understanding of the relationship between cultural information and the semantic factors that surface in descriptive linguistics by looking at a few selected issues in various cultural contexts. "Translation-problems, which are essentially problems of equivalence, may be conveniently treated under (1) ecology, (2) material culture, (3) social culture, (4) religious culture, and (5) linguistic culture.

Considering Fig.2, Iser (1972, p. 280) declares that the reader adds the dynamic features to the text by perceiving different 'schematized views' and relating them to one another. He argues that Sterne's conception of a literary text is similar to a ground in which both of the text and the reader play the game of imagination. The reader feels boredom if the whole idea is displayed for him, as a result he will be unable to enter the field or to activate his imagination.

Figure 2: Text and culture Iser (1972)



2.2. Problems of Translating Culture-Specific References

The type of culture specific references should be considered as the main focus for precise analysis (Dickins et al., 2002, p.49). culture-specific references may refer to name, geography, customs, habits, and administration within a particular culture (Newmark, 1988). Leppihalme (1997) sees that culture problems are divided into 'extralinguistic' ones. Leppihalme (1997, p.2) explain that some researchers (Nida 1964) have focused mainly on extralinguistic phenomena ranging from natural (winds, flora and fauna, etc.) to man-made (social institutions, buildings, markets, etc.) Other researchers: i.e., (Baker, 1992) focused on interlinguistic and pragmatic problems involving metaphors, allusions, idioms, proverbs, and ways of addressing a person, complimenting her/him or apologize.

2.3. Identification and Solution of Translation Problems

According to Wilss (1996, p.47) translation studies face deficiency regarding a consistent definition of translation problems plus a suitable, trustworthy conceptual framework. Lörcher (1991, p.112) points out that there hasn't been much practical research done and that the debate of translation issues has mostly been theoretical.

3. Methodology

This section shows the methodology of the work. The methodology starts with research design that illustrates the nature of this present study (qualitative method). To address the findings, the researcher collects qualitative data. The two databases are analyzed investigated and explored through the qualitative analysis. Additional research may be necessary for unexpected, non-significant, significant, or outlier findings.

In academic articles, the use of diverse research approaches explores more details about the miss translation of in the target text (Bracio & Szaruckie, 2020). Mason's (2006), cited in Bracio and Szaruckie (2020) shows how considering different techniques opens up a world of possibilities for exploring new topics. This approach frequently fits with our research plan. We were able to gather information from the comparison among the three Arabic texts and gain a deeper comprehension of the subject by qualitative approach.

The research comprises of three phases that enable an analysis of the research questions. The first step involves collecting and categorizing cultural features (CF)). As a first step, Nida categorization of cultural features is recognized. The second phase comprises the analysis of the cultural features in the three Arabic translation of the ST. This measures the difference and similarities of the ST and the three Arabic translations of the ST & picturing them via word programme. The final phase is exploring the acceptability and the adequacy of cultural features between the English and Arabic texts. A text such as a novel can have several different translations and each of those

translations will interpret the Cultural Features (CF) that are embedded within the text differently. Thus, instead of being focused only on the enabled cultural features it is essential to investigate which cultural features have been accepted and incorporated in their translations. In qualitative descriptive studies, Lambert and Lambert (2012) suggest that data collection focuses on finding the characteristics of the people or things being studied. The ST is compared with the TT and the RPs are drawn for the numerals at random. These features enable the analysis of the cultural parameters defined by a. Nida's Theory of the Translation Studies (1964) which serves for the analysis of ST and the TTs (Functional equivalence). b. Nida's categories of cultural feature are: (1) ecology; (2) material culture; (3) social culture; (4) religious culture; (5) and linguistic culture.

Based on theoretical framework (see ch.2), the samples of the study are selected according to Nida categorization of cultural features: (1) ecology, (2) material culture, (3) social culture, (4) religious culture, and (5) linguistic culture, that is to say, the sample is selected and labeled based on this division. The following are 10 examples of data: The examples highlight different translation strategies applied in rendering cultural references, idioms, and expressions into Arabic. The classification of cultural features follows Nida's framework, distinguishing between social, material, linguistic, and religious culture. Additionally, the table evaluates the acceptability of each translation, whether it aligns with the target audience's cultural and linguistic norms.

5. Findings

This section synthesizes the findings of the qualitative analysis of culture-specific items in *Little Women* and their renderings in three Arabic translations. Rather than presenting item-by-item examples, the discussion focuses on recurring translation patterns, dominant strategies, and their implications for acceptability and adequacy, in line with Nida's dynamic equivalence framework.

4.1. Social Culture

Social culture items exhibit a strong tendency toward domestication and functional adaptation. References that presuppose familiarity with Anglophone literary, social, or proverbial knowledge are frequently generalized or replaced with culturally equivalent Arabic expressions. This strategy enhances readability and communicative effectiveness for the target audience, thereby achieving a comparable receptor response. However, such adaptations often entail a reduction in intertextual specificity and sociocultural density present in the source text. The findings suggest that social culture poses persistent challenges due to divergent norms and shared knowledge between the source and target cultures.

4.2. Material Culture

Material culture items are commonly handled through cultural substitution and semantic reformulation. When source-text metaphors rely on objects or practices unfamiliar to Arabic readers, translators tend to replace them with more accessible imagery. While this approach facilitates comprehension and aligns with target-culture expectations, it modifies the original imagery and stylistic texture. The analysis indicates that material culture is particularly susceptible to shifts in imagery, reflecting the translators' prioritization of intelligibility over pictorial fidelity.

4.3. Religious Culture

Religious references reveal a marked pattern of neutralization and implicit adaptation. Expressions associated with Christian traditions are often rendered in culturally neutral terms, minimizing explicit religious markers. This strategy reflects sensitivity to the socioreligious context of the Arabic-speaking readership and supports acceptability. Nonetheless, it also results in partial attenuation of the source text's cultural specificity. The findings underscore the role of ideological and cultural considerations in shaping translation choices for religious content.

4.4. Linguistic Culture and Stylistic Features

Linguistic culture, including figurative language, seasonal imagery, and stylistic nuance, is addressed through simplification, paraphrase, and, in some cases, omission. When symbolic or stylistic features lack close equivalents in Arabic or risk misinterpretation, translators favor fluency and narrative flow. Although this strategy contributes to naturalness, it may lead to a loss of symbolic resonance and literary subtlety. The results demonstrate that linguistic culture is the area where the tension between aesthetic fidelity and communicative clarity is most pronounced.

4.5. Translation Style as an Emergent Pattern

Although the present study primarily focuses on culture-specific items and their acceptability, the findings also reveal distinct translation styles adopted by the three Arabic translators. These styles emerge through recurring strategic choices rather than explicit stylistic labeling. One translation demonstrates a predominantly domesticating style characterized by simplification, cultural substitution, and neutralization, prioritizing readability and receptor response. Another shows a relatively conservative style, maintaining closer adherence to source-text imagery and cultural specificity, albeit at the expense of fluency. The third reflects a mediating style that balances cultural adaptation with partial retention of source-text features. Thus, translation style in this study is understood as an outcome of consistent cultural and functional decisions aligned with Nida's dynamic equivalence framework rather than as an independent aesthetic pursuit.

4.6. Overall Patterns and Implications

Across all cultural categories, the translations exhibit a consistent orientation toward dynamic equivalence, privileging receptor response and cultural accessibility. The predominance of domestication, substitution, and neutralization strategies confirms the translators' efforts to integrate the text into the target culture. At the same time, the observed omissions and modifications highlight the inherent trade-off between acceptability and adequacy. These findings corroborate Nida's assertion that achieving naturalness often necessitates structural and cultural adjustments, while also demonstrating the limits of equivalence in culturally dense literary texts.

In sum, the results reveal that translating culture-specific items in *Little Women* involves negotiated choices shaped by cultural distance, reader expectations, and ideological sensitivity. The discussion emphasizes that successful literary translation is not a matter of direct transfer but of informed mediation between culture.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the translation of cultural features in literary texts, focusing on the strategies applied to render social, material, religious, and linguistic elements into Arabic. The findings indicate that a variety of translation techniques, including domestication, cultural substitution, omission, and adaptation, were employed to maintain fluency, readability, and cultural relevance in the target language. The qualitative design provided a structured approach by first analyzing the acceptability of translations and then complementing the analysis to explain the findings. Through Nida's categorization of cultural features, the study systematically examined how cultural meaning were handled in translation. However, instances of omission and modification raised concerns about fidelity and the extent to which cultural richness was preserved. The analysis highlights the challenges of translating culturally specific references while maintaining the intended meaning and readability. Social and religious culture posed particular difficulties, with shifts in terminology reflecting sensitivities in the Arabic-speaking audience. Linguistic adaptations and omissions, as seen in cases like "The gray dawn of Christmas morning," suggest that certain cultural or symbolic elements may not always have direct equivalents, leading to necessary modifications. Overall, the study underscores the dynamic nature of translation, where choices must balance fidelity to the source text with cultural and linguistic coherence for the target audience. Future research could further explore how readers from different cultural backgrounds perceive such adaptations, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of literary translation strategies.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants according to the Declaration of Helsinki.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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