

Translation Studies: Shifts in Domestication and Foreignisation in Translating Japanese Manga and Anime (Part One)

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Abstract: Japanese pop culture such as manga and anime are now hugely popular throughout the world. How to translate these forms of entertainment from Japanese to English has been hotly debated for many years. This essay examines the translation strategy of domestication and foreignisation and how they have been applied to the translation of Japanese popular media of manga and anime.

Key Words: [Domestication & Foreignisation] [Fansubbing/Fandubbing]
[Manga & Anime]

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Modern translation is constantly being forced to change and evolve to compensate for an ever-shrinking world with its constant hunger for quality translations across areas like business, international relations and entertainment. The methods of old are being swept away and replaced with new ideas that are redefining the way translators approach their work. This essay will examine one of these new translation strategies, domestication and foreignisation, defining what they are, what role they play and the effect they have had on the translation of Japanese popular culture into English.

Part one looks at translation studies and the evolution of domestication and foreignisation. It will examine and define both domestication and foreignisation through the works of their main supporters, specifically Lawrence Venuti and Eugene Nida as well as the changing state of worldwide translation studies.

Part two is a brief introduction to the world of fan made English translations of anime and manga known as fansubs and scanlations. It looks at what they are, how they are produced, their rise to popularity, recent changes and the ongoing battle over legality.

Part three focuses on manga and how it is translated and localised into English. It will

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look at the degree of domestication and foreignisation in both visual and written translation through a comparison between scanlations and different officially translated manga versions. Looking at how each group address things like censorship, layout, sound effects and cultural markers and their effects on one another leading to any shifts in translation approach.

The final part similarly looks at the levels of domestication and foreignisation within English translations of anime. It will look at the evolution and different translation techniques of fansubs and official licensed productions and their effects on one another. It will investigate how differences between social and moral views effect how anime is translated for Western audiences and whether or not there has been any change over time.

Part One:

Domestication and Foreignisation

With around 6500 languages in the modern world, translation is needed on a daily basis. Business, industry, education, religion, entertainment and international relations all require multiple people working on various translations using a varying range of techniques. With both the structural and cultural differences between multiple languages, like that of Japanese and English, a simple word for word substitution from one language to another will lead to an unintelligible piece of text. It is often said that translators must be proficient in both the language and culture from which they are translating.¹ Over the centuries translators have constantly refined their techniques while proposing new ideas to meet the changing times and society. Some of the most basic and commonly used translation techniques include '**Equivalence**', replacing words and sayings from one language with their equivalent in the other; '**Adaption**', taking a cultural unknown of one language and changing it into something different but still similar so the target language speaker can relate; '**Omission**', taking out non-vital or repetitive information considered distracting to the target language; '**Information addition or deletion**', when a cultural unknown requires removal or added explanation.²

Things like the purpose of the translation, the wants and demands of the target audience and even the format of the source material have led to the evolution and multiple variations of these translation techniques. However with all these different techniques translators can often be left saying, What should I use to translate this? What should I leave in and take out? How do I deal with something culturally specific? How much can you change before it becomes different from what its creator intended? Like most things in the world, translators cannot agree on how to answer these questions and decide which ways are best, leading to a number of competing translation strategies and numerous debates over the centuries.

Beginnings

In today's modern world of language translation one of the most controversial and hotly debated topics is over the relatively new concept of domestication and foreignisation. It is a concept in translation that deals with the degree to which a translator changes a text to make it conform to a certain target audience or culture. Simply put, domestication involves the translator changing the text to ensure it closely conforms to the culture of the language it is being translated into, which often leads to a loss of information, message, nuance or emotional impact from the original source material. Domestication translation's main aim is to minimize all of the strangeness of the foreign culture and text to create an easily accessible piece of material for the target audience. Foreignisation, on the other hand, involves the translator keeping in these foreign features from the source text in order to retain its meaning, even though this act requires purposely breaking the conventions of the target language.³

The concept of domestication and foreignisation can be traced back to the work of 18th and 19th century European translators when there was an increase in the demand for translated literature, especially The Bible. Various translators of the time began to sow the seeds of the modern domestication and foreignisation debate. On one side was the famous Russian, Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), best known for his novel *War and Peace*, whose French translation of the New Testament in 1883 took domestication to an extreme length with him altering and omitting material that he deemed was a detriment to the meaning and intent of the original writers.⁴ On the opposite end of the scale was the German scholar and translator Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who in one of his most famous lectures entitled '*On the Different Ways of Translation*' (1813) stated that he firmly believed that translations from different languages into German should read and sound different, with the reader being able to see the differences in a translation from Spanish or Greek, believing that if all translations were alike, the identity, meaning and impact of the source material would be lost.⁵ Schleiermacher stated,

Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader toward him. Or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible, and moves the author toward him.⁶

This line of thought was also shared by the German writer and translator Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), who, in a lecture around the same time as Schleiermacher's, put forth his belief that,

There are two maxims in translation: one requires that the author of a foreign nation be brought across to us in such a way that we can look on him as ours; the other requires that we should go across to what is foreign and adapt ourselves to its conditions, its use of language, its peculiarities.⁷

Foreignisation and Venuti

These early ideas and methods of domestication and foreignisation continued to evolve into the 20th century until the American professor and professional translator Lawrence Venuti revised and formulated them for the modern world with his popular 1995 book *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*.⁸ In this book, Venuti puts forth his concept that translation of material from one culture into another requires much more than just simple black and white choice of what gets translated or what does not, but in fact requires a choice between the two translation methods of foreignisation and domestication. This initial choice of which approach to adopt at the beginning of a project will affect the whole translation process, which will lead to either a final product that is easily recognisable and therefore easily accessible to the intended audience, or to a product that constantly reminds the target audience of the cultural differences.⁹ Venuti is an ardent supporter of the foreignisation approach to translating, following on with the ideas of Schleiermacher in the belief that the translator should ensure their work through the entire translation process seeks to preserve the foreignness of a text and adequately conveys the cultural of the source language even if it leads to break the grammatical rules of the target language. This idea is evident in his statement that

The foreign in foreignising translation is not a transparent representation of an essence that resides in the foreign text, and is valuable in itself, but a strategic construction whose value is contingent on the current situation in the receiving culture. Foreignising translation signifies the differences of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the codes that prevail in the translating language.¹⁰

Venuti is quite a controversial figure in translation studies, mainly due to the fact that his views on the domestication and foreignisation debate run past a simple linguistic argument and into cultural and political issues. He takes the viewpoint that due to the political and economic power of the West, other languages and cultures have been reduced to minorities resulting in the emergence of an Anglo-American hegemony in the modern translation world.¹¹ He continues with the belief that the profit driven actions of publishers, editors and companies have imprinted vast foreign audiences with English language values and culture whilst also creating an Anglo-American audience that is “aggressively

monolingual” and who stay away from anything different and even enjoy seeing their own culture in a cultural other.¹² He even goes as far as to say that this problem is a reflection on Anglo-American overall complacency with cultures other than their own, “as imperialistic abroad and xenophobic at home”.¹³ This English domination over other languages has led to what Venuti calls the ‘invisibility’ of the translator, who is often exploited with low wages and a lack of adequate recognition.

Venuti also believes that the act of translation is in fact an inherently violent process, that as a translator, one must dismantle, rearrange, eliminate and damage a foreign text in order for it to conform to the beliefs, morals and ethics of the target audience’s culture.¹⁴ He states that,

Translation is the forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text with a text that is intelligible to the translating-language reader” and that now the translation is “imprinted by the receiving culture, assimilated to its positions of intelligibility, its canons and taboos, its codes and ideologies.”¹⁵

He continues this with the notion that the domestication method of translation further compounds this violence and that the legal and cultural constraints on the translator are concealed under a cloak of transparency and the illusion of fluency. While admitting that this abuse can almost never be avoided, Venuti believes that if left unchecked this can lead to over domestication of a text causing wide-ranging problems at both home and abroad. To Venuti, the foreignisation method of translation attempts to limit this ethnocentric violence and can contribute to the betterment of world relations through its resistance to inherent racism, imperialism and cultural narcissism within Anglo-American culture.¹⁶ A good translation would show the foreign elements and would take the audience on a journey allowing them to enjoy the differences.

Of course, Venuti’s views have garnered a fair amount of criticism, with some people stating that he fails to adequately define foreignisation,¹⁷ or that he unfairly paints domestication in a negative light with aggressive arguments that are to the detriment of translation studies as a whole.¹⁸ Many translators and companies believe that the domestication method is a much better and more viable approach to language translation. Like foreignisation, the ideas behind domestication began many centuries ago, however in the modern world one of its main proponents and a sort of opposing figure head to Venuti, up until his death in 2011, was the American linguist, Eugene Nida.¹⁹

Domestication and Nida

Nida was a leader in the field of translations and linguistics for many decades and

was often celebrated for his Bible and religious translations.²⁰ He is also credited with the creation of the formal equivalence and dynamic (functional) equivalence methods of translation. These two ideas were first put forward by Nida in 1964 with his influential book, *Toward a Science of Translating* and were initially used for Bible based translations but were later adapted and developed for a wider use over the years. As stated above, equivalence involves replacing words and sayings from one language with their equivalent in the other. The formal equivalence approach takes this further having the translator focusing on the message itself and trying to create a product that is as close as possible to the original source material without anything added or changed. This method produces a very literal translation that limits any change in story or meaning but also becomes much less accessible to those without knowledge of the subject matter.²¹ This is a somewhat limited method of translation that seemingly harks back to the outdated word for word literal translation, however Nida believes it to be a structurally different method to literal translations and therefore should be kept separate.²² Nida prefers to call these formal equivalence translations 'gloss translations' because they would require lengthy explanatory notes.²³

The second method of dynamic, later renamed functional equivalence, is a much more domestication based concept that Nida was a strong supporter of. Dynamic equivalence sees the message of the original being transferred over, by taking each piece of the source material and changing it into sentences in the target language that convey the same overall meaning, but sacrificing phrasings, nuances or cultural markers for the sake of fluency.²⁴ Nida believes, "A translator must be a person who can draw aside the curtains of linguistic and cultural differences so that people may see clearly the relevance of the original message".²⁵

Of course, it is also easy to see how these ideas were originally meant for the translation of the Bible, with the goal of spreading the word of God in order to convert others. This and dynamic equivalency's dependence on fluency is what Nida's critics, especially Venuti, take issue with. Venuti believes that the concept of dynamic/functional equivalency clearly involves domestication and placing English language vocations upon foreign texts and that Nida's theories on translation were motivated by his religious views in order to push Christian dogma and evangelism.²⁶

Debate

There is a myriad of differing viewpoints on domestication and foreignisation and they are all affected by their particular perspectives and circumstances. There are good points and bad points with both sides and it is difficult to come to a decision as to just which

technique is the best, often coming down to just the translator's personal preference. However while scholars and linguists have debated on how to use domestication and foreignisation translation concepts on things such as novels, international treaties and the Bible, another debate has raged on internet message boards, websites and comic conventions about how to apply those exact same ideas to the English translation of Japanese manga and anime.

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