

Translating Culture-Specific Items (CSIs) in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* into French and Sinhala

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Abstract - The present study examines the translation of culture-specific items (CSIs) in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1983). In this particular source text (ST), Ondaatje, one of Sri Lanka's preeminent Diaspora writers, narrates his family history and anecdotes in a language influenced by Sri Lankan culture. The French translation *Un air de famille* by Marie-Odile Fortier-Masek and the Sinhala translation *Pavule Uruva* by Sepala Wijesekara are selected for this comparative study. The objective of the study is to investigate the strategies employed by translators and to understand the approach that they have adopted in their respective translations. The study refers to Peter Newmark's cultural categories (1988) and only three are selected for the present study: food, flora and fauna, and social organizations. The CSIs are identified in the ST and their equivalents in the translations are found, categorized, and analyzed. The foreignization and domestication strategies based on Aixelá (1996) and Newmark (1988) are applied to the analysis. The analysis reveals foreignization strategies such as Transference and Through-translation are frequently applied by the French translator while domestication strategies such as Limited and Absolute Universalization are also practiced. In Sinhala, the dominant foreignization strategies appear to be Orthographic Adaptation and Through-translation. Domestication strategies such as Deletion and Limited Universalization are also preferred by the Sinhala translator. By comparing the strategies used in the two translations to translate the CSIs, the study shows to what extent the translators have adopted foreignization and domestication in their translations.

Keywords: *culture, domestication, foreignization, Sri Lanka, strategies*

I. INTRODUCTION

Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the family* is set in Sri Lanka in the early 1900s when it was called Ceylon. It contains terms related to Sri Lankan culture which present numerous challenges to its translators. The strategies employed by the translators could either make these terms comprehensive to the reader or retain them to highlight their exotic nature. The present study examines the strategies used in the French and Sinhala translations of the ST aiming to understand to what extent they practice foreignization and domestication.

II. METHODOLOGY

Items related to culture are known by various terms: culture-bound, culture-specific, culture inferences (elements, terms, items, expressions), realia, 'allusions', or, more generally, 'cultural references' [1]. They include food, clothing, flora, and fauna, housing, and many more.

Broadening the concept, Basnet defines them as an "abstract or concrete source language concept". She further adds that they are unfamiliar to the target culture (TC) [2]. Speaking of translation and culture, Peter Newmark divides various cultural aspects into five categories [3]. Given time and resource constraints, only three are selected for the study: Food from Material Culture, flora and fauna from Ecology, and Social Organizations (SO) including toponyms.

Running in the Family was translated into many languages. It was translated into French by Marie-Odile Fortier-Masek and published in 1991 ((Édition de l'Olivier). The Sinhala translation appeared much later in 2012, translated by Sepala Wijesekara (Sarasavi Publishers). In the ST, CSIs belonging to food, flora, fauna and SO are identified and presented in Table 1. Their equivalents in Sinhala and French are also listed. Once the CSIs are identified, the strategy employed by the translators to translate them is examined. For this purpose, domestication and foreignization strategies elaborated by Aixelá and Newmark are applied. Accordingly, Limited Universalization, Absolute Universalization, Naturalization, Deletion, and Synonyms are considered domestication strategies. Transference, Orthographic Adaptation, Extra-textual Gloss, Intra-textual Gloss, Through-translation, and Pre-established Translation are identified as foreignization strategies [4]. Lawrence Venuti describes domestication as an "ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text" that eliminates what is foreign and exotic while foreignization, which is preferred by him, is called an 'ethno-deviant pressure' that registers the cultural differences. Further, foreignization allows to emphasize presence of the translator [5].

The strategies employed by translators to translate the above-mentioned CSI categories are discussed. These strategies are analyzed and identified as belonging to foreignization or domestication. By comparing the strategies in French and Sinhala, the study reveals to what extent the two translators adopt foreignization and domestication. It also highlights strategies preferred by each translator when faced with the challenge of translating terms belonging to the chosen cultural categories.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The CSIs identified in the ST and the two target texts (TT) are listed and categorized in Table 1. Fifteen CSIs are analyzed in each category. Table 1 presents only the most significant CSIs.

Table 1 – Examples of CSI in ST and their translations in TTs

| Category | ST | TT - French | TT- Sinhala |
|-----------------|---|--|---|
| Flora and fauna | Scimitar babbler | Coucou-épervier | - |
| | The Karapohtas | Les Karapohtas | Karapohttho |
| | Jesus lizards | Lézards | - |
| | High flowers | Hautes fleurs | Pol mal |
| | Croton seeds | Le croton d'Inde | Croton beeja |
| | Syzygium | Le syzigium | Sisjium (isiscshī) |
| Food | Toddy | Le vin de palme | - |
| | Egg rulang | Œuf rulang | Biththara rulang |
| | String hoppers/ hoppers | Sauterelles | Indi appa/ appa |
| | Eggs cooked | Une omelette | Biththara thembuvaya |
| | Kurumba - the half form white | Kurumba - ce lait à demie caillé | Kurumba - londa |
| | Curd | Du fromage blanc | Mudavapu kiri |
| SO/ Toponyms | St. Thomas' Church | Église de Saint-Thomas | Santha Thomas dev medura |
| | Good Shepherd Convent | Le couvent du bon pasteur | Yahapath ederage kanyaramaya |
| | Mount Lavinia | Le mont Lavinia | Galkissa |
| | The Ceylon Cactus and Succulent Society | La société cinghalaise des cactus et plantes grasses | Lanka pathok ha mansala shaka sangamaya |
| | Marble beach | Marble beach | Mable beach (udn,a řé) |
| | Sigiriya | Sigiriya | Sinha gala |

All the identified CSIs in the TTs are analyzed and the strategy applied by the translators is identified as favoring domestication or foreignization. In the first category, the French translator mainly opts for Transference, Through-translation, and Limited Universalization. In the Sinhala translation, Deletion stands out as a preferred strategy. Apart from it, the translator applies Orthographic Adaptation, and Limited Universalization. Orthographic Adaptation is inevitable when English names are transliterated into Sinhala. The second category of food reveals surprising or even shocking discoveries. The French translator uses Limited and Absolute Universalization misleading the reader. String hoppers and hoppers which are popular local dishes are translated into French as *Sauterelles*. It means grasshopper. The translator's lack of understanding of the ST culture leads to a grave error. Further, by replacing toddy and curd with wine and *Fromage Blanc* respectively, which are French food items more familiar to the TT reader, the translator shows a strong inclination towards domestication. Another example that is worth mentioning is the translation of cooked eggs. The term cook does not indicate a precise method. Therefore, TTs, it has been domesticated favoring the gastronomical tendencies of each culture. The French translator chooses an omelet while the Sinhala translator settles for boiled eggs. Transference and Through-translation are also practiced by the French translator as certain names of local dishes such as *mallung* and *egg rulang* are borrowed and some are literally translated. In the third category, the dominant strategy in French is Through-

translation whereas in, Sinhala, it is Orthographic Adaptation. Both translators use Through-translation for social organizations such as The Ceylon Cactus and Succulent Society. Additionally, the Sinhala translator has recourse to Synonyms using a parallel term to translate Sigiriya as *Sinha gala*, even though Sigiriya exists in Sinhala.

III. CONCLUSION

It is evident that in each category, both translators have resorted to a combination of domestication and foreignization strategies. However, a particular tendency towards a certain approach can be discerned in each category. As Sri Lankan culture is new and exotic to the French reader, the TT contains more borrowings. Transference, a foreignization strategy, is frequently seen in French translation. The Sinhala reader is already familiar with the ST culture, and food or flora and fauna mentioned in the ST do not pose any difficulty. However, the Sinhala translator notably practices Deletion when the translation of certain species of fauna poses a challenge. For example, frog mouths, nightjars, flycatchers, and brain fever birds are eliminated in the Sinhala TT. Deletion is considered a domestication strategy. A dominant foreignization strategy visible in the Sinhala translation is Orthographic Adaptation mainly in Flora and fauna and Social Organizations including toponyms. Limited Universalization is particularly preferred by both the translators in each category offering familiar equivalents to each readership.

However, the risks of Absolute Universalization are clearly visible in the French TT. As discussed above, the strategy results in misrepresenting Sri Lankan cuisine. The importance of adequate knowledge of the ST culture is further emphasized by this example.

As the study is limited to only three cultural categories, the use of other strategies cannot be observed. For example, the practice of giving footnotes which are known as Extratextual Gloss, a foreignization strategy, is seen only in the French TT. A comprehensive analysis of all the cultural categories could shed more light on how CSIs are translated into French and Sinhala.

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