

## A study on the relationship between translation ecology and food translation

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### Abstract

Despite the multidisciplinary nature of food studies and its being one of the most interesting subjects among cross-cultural research, the concept of food has not been dwelled upon as it is expected within the translation studies. As a representative of culture, food is traveling through language and translation has a significant effect either on its adoption or rejection by the target culture. Moving from the background of translation ecology and its interaction with food ecology, this study aims to reveal the effect of translators in the globalization of the food items or making them stay local through their strategies adopted in the translation process. In order to do so, the English translations of the food items in one of the best-selling Turkish modern novels, *Piraye*, were investigated, as it is set in Diyarbakır, a representative city of the culinary culture of the South-eastern part of Turkey. During the data analysis of the randomly selected samples, the self-positioning of the translator was observed with the use of the strategies such as explanations, footnotes, omission, and addition. This study reveals in a general sense the dominant role of the translator within the frame of translation ecology and more specifically, his effective contribution to the process of the transfer of food items foregrounding the migratory nature of the culinary cultures.

**Keywords:** Translation ecology, food ecology, culinary culture, translation strategies, self-positioning of translators.

## Çeviri ekolojisi ile yemek çevirisi arasındaki ilişki üzerine bir çalışma

### Öz

Yemek çalışmalarının çok disiplinli ve kültürlerarası arařtırmaların en ilgi çekici konularından biri olmasına rağmen, yemek kavramı üzerinde çeviri çalışmalarını kapsamında beklendiđi kadar çalışma yapılmamıştır. Kültürü temsil eden unsurlardan biri olarak yemek, dil vasıtasıyla yolculuk yapar ve yemeđin hedef kültür tarafından kabul edilmesinde ya da reddedilmesinde çevirinin büyük katkısı vardır. Bu çalışma, çeviri ekolojisinden ve çeviri ekolojisi ile yemek ekolojisi arasındaki ilişkiden yola çıkarak yemek unsurlarının küreselleşmesinde ya da yerel kalmasında çevirmenlerin çeviri süreçlerinde benimsedikleri stratejilerin etkisini göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bunun için Türkiye'nin güneydoğusunun mutfak kültürünü temsil eden bir şehir olan Diyarbakır'da geçen ve en çok satan modern Türk eserlerden biri olan *Piraye* adlı romandaki yemek unsurlarının çevirisi incelenmiştir. Rastgele seçilen örneklerin analizinde, çevirmenin açıklama, dipnot, çıkarma ve ekleme gibi stratejileri kullanarak kendisini konumlandırma biçimi gözlemlenmiştir. Çalışma, genel olarak, çeviri ekolojisi çerçevesinde çevirmenin baskın rolünü, özellikle de mutfak kültürünün göç edici doğasını vurgulayarak yemek unsurlarının aktarımı sürecinde çevirmenin önemli katkılarını göstermektedir.

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**Anahtar kelimeler:** Çeviri ekolojisi, yemek ekolojisi, mutfak kültürü, çeviri stratejileri, çevirmenin kendini konumlandırması

## 1. Introduction

It was after the cultural turn that translation studies has become an interdisciplinary field mainly in close relationship with the cultural studies and since then, there has been a growing interest in investigating the problematic nature of transferring cultural items which in a sense proves the uniqueness of each culture. In other words, as a process consisting of two languages and two different cultural backgrounds, even two different cognitive conceptualizations, the act of translation requires the involvement of the translator within the source and target cultures in order to overcome the challenges. In that sense, the translator can be described as someone who is or should be knowledgeable in terms of the social, cultural, political, and cognitive background of the source and the target text to be accepted by a specific audience he is translating for, proving the significant role he is playing during this process. This psychological and physiological involvement of the translator during translation was theorized by the Chinese scholars as “Eco-translatology” which adheres to the tendency of “translator-centeredness” (Hu, 2008, 2011). Furthermore, Cronin (2017), in his work *Eco-Translation*, aimed to extend the approach of Scott’s eco-translatology, and elaborated on the issue of translation in terms of technology, literature, and sociology, such as the investigation of the relationship between food, language and translation ecology.

Briefly put, eco-translatology requires the investigation of the whole translation process in a holistic approach by focusing on the dominance of the translator in this act. The self-positioning of the translator has created heated debates more than ever mainly after the publication of Venuti’s work (1995), *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* in which he supported the invisible approach while translating. By emphasizing the relationship between the translator and the text living a socio-cultural context, he put forward that: “A translated text should be the site where a different culture emerges, where a reader gets a glimpse of a cultural other, and resistancy, a translation strategy based on an aesthetic of discontinuity, can best preserve that difference, that otherness, by reminding the reader of the gains and losses in the translation process, and the unbridgeable gap between cultures” (Venuti, 1995, p. 206). Later on, the translation scholars have begun to discuss the central position of the translator in translation activities which requires the adaptation of the translator in both the ecology of the source text and the target text and recreation of the text in the foreign environment by adopting specific strategies.

After Cronin’s influential work, there have been few studies focusing on the relationship between food, culture, and translation. For instance, Chiaro and Rossato (2015) compared between the act of translation and preparing a meal: “Translation begins with an alien text made up of words that are strung together through syntax, in turn upheld by grammar; similarly, a foreign dish consists of a number of unusual ingredients, combined in such a way as to create a dish that is acceptable within a diverse culinary culture.” (p. 238). Accordingly, translators are like cooks, as they analyze the source text just like the cooks analyze the original recipe, search for the required words and ingredients in the case of cooks, and adopt appropriate strategies, for instance adding or omitting an ingredient in terms of cooks, and words in the case of translators (ibid.).

Despite the acceptance of food as one of the main items of culture, many studies have been focusing on the challenges and the strategies of translators when translating culture-specific items in general, but

the distinctive challenges of translating food items for the translators have been under-researched. To name a few, Demir (2019) specifically focused on the children's literature and analyzed the translation strategies of two different translators for translating food items and revealed that both translators adopted a target-oriented approach when transferring food items. Oster and Cases (2016) investigated the translators' decisions when translating food-related items in a parallel corpus of German original narrative texts and their translations into Spanish and Catalan and concluded that both foreignization and domestication strategies were observed.

The literature review demonstrates that eco-translatology is a very young field applied in translation studies and is thought to be crucial for contributing to the field by integrating the concept of translation ecology into the investigation of the translation of cultural transfers among different languages. Thus, this study intends to provide an insight into the significance of translators' decisions in the translation process and the importance of dwelling into the source and target text ecology while translating especially the culture-specific items: food in this case. More specifically, by investigating the relationship between translation and ecology, this work targets at revealing the effect of translators in the globalization of the food items or making them stay local through their strategies adopted in the translation process by investigating a best-seller Turkish contemporary novel rich in local food items.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Hu's eco-translatology

The inconsistencies in the contemporary translation studies and the imbalances they have created between West and East is believed to be compensated by the eco-translation paradigm (Hu and Tao, 115). The contemporary translation theories have shown that a translation theory should be holistic integrating linguistic, cultural, social, communicative, and cognitive aspects through focusing both the target and the source text environment. By applying the ecological principles and theories, Eco-translatology was initiated by Chinese translation scholars. The research theories of eco-translatology are the translation ecology which is the ecological environment of translation, the life of the texts in the translation process, the survival of the translators such as the living standards and working conditions of the translator (Hu and Tao, p. 125). These aspects reveal that translation is a process that requires to be dwelled upon within a multi-dimensional frame.

According to Hu (2004), Eco-translatology can be interpreted from four main aspects: 1) translation process which is the process of the translator's adaptation and selection; 2) translation principle that is the multi-dimensional selective adaptation and adaptive selection; 3) translation method including linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions; 4) evaluation criterion, multi-dimensional transformations, readers' feedback, and translators' quality.

As put forth, the Eco-translatology theory takes the Darwinian concept of adaptation and selection as its theoretical foundation which foregrounds translator-centeredness (Hu, 2004, 2008, 2011). Simply put, it is the translator's responsibility to adapt to the source translational environment they are living in which is the target language culture. In terms of selection, it is again the responsibility of the translation to select the most appropriate way of translation. These old concepts considered through a new perspective and these new approaches to translation have led to the revival of translatability and untranslatability discussions within new interpretations. For instance, translators have gained a central position for determining whether to translate a culture-specific item or leaving them as it is, or

transferring it through different strategies. Hu believed that translator-centeredness is initially the translator's adaptation to the translational eco-environment and then his/ her selection of the translation in terms of translational eco-environment.

In terms of cultural transfers through translation, Hu (2004) asserted that "There is agreement that translation is a language activity, that language is an activity as part of a culture, that culture is a result of human activity, and that human activity is part of the natural world" (qtd. in Wang, 2014, p. 56). There are always significant differences among each language culture which brings about challenges for the translator. It is the responsibility of the translator to be culture-conscious and have the cultural and cognitive knowledge of both the source and target language cultures in order to achieve accuracy in the whole translation process. By considering the linguistic, cultural, and communicative dimensions, it is the burden of the translator to choose among a variety of strategies and transfer the cultural item from the source language culture to the target one accurately.

## **2.2. Cronin's food ecology and translation of food items**

In one of the chapters of Cronin's work, "Eating Our Words", he focused on food occupying the central place in human existence and considered as one of the most important cultural items of society. Similarly enough, in the introductory chapter of Montanari's (2004) work, it was pointed out that human beings eat not only the things they find in nature just like animals, they also produce food for themselves which are specific unto themselves and it is the time when food becomes culture. Furthermore, food is considered as culture when it is prepared by men, as they tend to prepare food by using the products in their diets and cook in their kitchens. Also, food is culture when it is eaten because people choose what to eat on different occasions by taking into consideration the social, economic, and nutritional aspects (pp. xi-xii). Thus, food is associated with culture and studied widely especially within the framework of cultural studies.

While mentioning the movement of food across languages through the act of translation, Cronin (2017) emphasized that there is "inescapable globalization of food" no matter how the translator has "the desire to domesticate the otherness of food". He focused on the relationship between food, language, and ecology and stated that "it is the untranslatability of food or drink item which becomes the very condition of its translatability" (p. 43).

Cronin emphasized that the migratory nature of food cultures from a source society to the target one puts the translator in a challenging condition and forces him or her to overcome the problems by finding appropriate strategies. For instance, for the domestication of a food item, the diacritics can be removed from the word and it can be written unitalicized in order not to draw attention to its being foreign. Cronin provided the example of a non-English term "pâté" used in the description of dishes. Another strategy can be that the food items are first provided in the target language and then in the source language. Also, the original food item can be given in a parenthetical form. Furthermore, he pointed out that food words usually appear as calques in a language such as burrito, kebab, pizza, christmas pudding, etc. On the strategy of zero translation, he asserted that the food or drink item is paraphrased and he gave the example of "Starbucks" where the composition of a drink is described in definitional terms such as "espresso with steamed milk." As an example of a foreignization translation strategy, he provided the use of "latte" globally. Cronin also mentioned the Japanese local food culture which resists losing the distinctiveness of the cultural identity.

In terms of translational productivity, he pointed out that when a translator cannot find a ready and exact equivalent ingredient in the target culinary culture, he can use the most equivalent ingredient among others. However, an item can have social or cultural importance for that society; thus, the translator should be very careful while selecting from the translation ecology.

No matter which strategy the translator adopts, Cronin put forth that there is no translation without transformation, which means that texts can no longer remain immutable. Thus, there are some additions or deletions from that food item traveling to another culture. In order to achieve optimal accuracy in translation, it is essential that the translator knows and understands the culinary culture and codes in both the source text ecology and the target text ecology.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 The corpus

The corpus drawn upon in this study is a bestseller work of Canan Tan (2003), *Piraye*, and its English translation *Piraye, The Bride of Diyarbakır* made by Kenneth Dakan (2012). *Piraye* is a novel of a young and educated woman who grew up in a big city but married a man from Diyarbakır and settled in there. The novel tells the story of Piraye who has difficult times in learning the traditional life of his new family and getting used to the cultural characteristics of this city such as the food culture.

The reason for selecting this work for analysis is that the novel is set in Diyarbakır, a province in the South-eastern part of Anatolia and among the oldest cities in the world. It is considered as the cradle of civilization in Turkey and famous for its culinary culture. Thus, it is rich in the culture-specific food items that can be elaborated within the frame of eco-translation theory and food ecology.

#### 3.2. Data analysis

Adopting the eco-translatology theory, this study is a descriptive one with a qualitative approach. For examining the translation of food items in the novel, initially, a thorough and detailed reading of the novel is conducted to find the food-related items. When each one is found in the source text, it is recorded and then, the translation of that specific item is found in the target text. When the list is completed, the translation strategies are analyzed and they are interpreted by providing a cultural and cognitive basis. The selected samples are presented in the study with the aim of revealing the various tendencies of the translator while transferring the food ecology into the target language culture. To put it more specifically, as the theory of eco-translatology foregrounds the translator's visibility and his or her dominance during the translation process in order to reveal the self-positioning of the translator, the use of the translation strategies such as explanations, footnotes, omission, supplementing, and addition is investigated.

### 4. Results and discussion

After the reading of the source text, it can be put forward that the novel is rich in revealing the south-eastern Anatolian culinary culture and it was observed in terms of translation that the translator preserves his central position, especially when transferring the food-related cultural items.

While transferring the food culture to the target reader, one of the strategies used by the translator is the footnote which is a macro-strategy for the translation of food items. Footnotes are the paratextual

elements used at the bottom of the page. Having mainly an informative function, they help the reader understand the translation more accurately. For instance, for the translation of “irmik helvası”, after the transfer of the item in italics, the translator provides a description through a footnote that is “traditional Turkish meal” (Tan, 2012, p. 35). However, this informative explanation is not sufficient in giving the exact definition of the term. With this footnote, it is very difficult for the reader to visualize the food. The reader cannot gain information about the taste of the item or how it is cooked. The translator chooses to be visible with his strategy in this example.

The other adopted strategy for the translation of food items is the explanation, that can be observed in the translation of “zeytinyağlı sarma”. For the translation of this food item, as the translator cannot find the linguistic and the cultural equivalence, he prefers to transfer the food as it is, firstly in italics, and then, he reveals the ingredients of the food. As Cronin stated, the solution to the transfer of some of the culture-specific food items is to “include the original ingredients and a list of possible substitutes” (2017, p. 63). Thus, in this work, the translator writes “*zeytinyağlı sarma*” for “zeytinyağlı sarma” with the explanation that it is “the stuffed grape leaves and chilled cabbage rolls dizzled with olive oil” (Tan, 2012, p. 154).

Another instance can be “içli köfte” which is transferred to the target culture by italicizing and proving the ingredients of the item which is “fried croquettes stuffed with a savary mixture of some kind” (p. 153), which is not enough for describing this culture-specific food item.

Furthermore, for the translation of “su böreği”, the translator provides the literal translation which is “water pastry”, and then, she reveals the ingredients as “sheets of boiled dough layered with white cheese, olive oil, butter and parsley, and baked in the oven” (pp. 177-178), and lastly, she transfers the item in paranthesis and by italicizing.

Another interesting example can be the translation of “aşure”, which is a highly culture-specific item. It is in the first place provided as it is and in italics and then explained as “a kind of pudding” which is a traditional dessert of the target culture. Following this, the ingredients of aşure are revealed to the target reader in order to help them distinguish between the pudding and the mentioned Turkish traditional dessert. It is transferred as “a pudding made with wheat, beans, rice, dried fruit, pomegranate seeds, walnuts, rosewater” (p. 333).

Last but not least, “kibe bumbar” is translated as “kibe bumbar” by italicizing the word, and with the explanation that “kibe is stuffed tripe”; “bumbar is stuffed intestines” (p. 177). This explanation continues with the information that they are both regional delicacies foregrounding the culture-specificity of this food item both in the source and the target text.

As mentioned before, Cronin (2017) stated that a translator is just like a cook. It can be observed in the translation of “sıkma pilavı” which is transferred to the target culture as “*sıkma pilaf*”. This food item is explained in the source text through revealing the ingredients and it is translated as such: “Sıkma turns out to be minced meat seasoned with salt, black pepper and spices, shaped into tiny meatballs and fried before being stewed in a tomato broth flavored with pomegranate molasses. It is served in little bowls and spooned, along with its broth, onto mounds of pilaf” (p. 196). When the exact equivalence of the food item cannot be found in the target culture, writing the ingredients just like providing recipes can be a strategy of the translator.

However, sometimes, it is also very difficult to find the ingredients which are specific to the source culture. According to Cronin, a suggested solution is to find substitutes. In such cases, the reader should be alerted that the translation includes the original ingredients and a list of possible substitutes. Cronin stated that “translators should stick as closely as possible to the original and if ideas for substitutes are being offered, the translator must explain why” (qtd. in Cronin, 2017, p. 63). He emphasized the possibility that the target reader can try the food item in the kitchen, that is why the ingredients should be carefully selected and transferred to the target reader.

Nevertheless, the translator sometimes opts for transferring the food as it is without giving a description which is very problematic for the target reader to visualize the food. For instance, “piyaz”, “ezme salatası”, “dolma”, “köfte”, “manti” are foreignized by the translator as they are provided to the target culture only by italicizing which can be considered as a way of making the reader feel the foreignness. In other words, as Cronin put it, the untranslated and italicized food items can be considered as a metonymic reminder of otherness (2017, p. 43).

Furthermore, “çiğ köfte” is another interesting example that can be discussed in this study, as it is provided without revealing the ingredients. It is transferred into English firstly as “çiğ köfte” without italicizing and giving the ingredients. The literal translation is done by adding an adjective, “spicy raw meatballs” (p. 196). After this translation, it is foregrounded both in the source and the target text that in this region, it is always the man’s job to spend up hours “kneading together the lean ground beef, bulgur, pepper taste, red peppers flakes and fresh parsley” (ibid.).

In some instances, it was observed that the translator chooses to foreignize the food item only by using the transposition strategy as in the example of musakka which is transferred to the target culture as “mousakka” without providing further explanation. But “şerbet”, which is a traditional drink of Turkish people, is transferred as “sherbet”, but the utterance goes on by emphasizing that people in Diyarbakır always drink sherbet at betrothals and they even call betrothel nights as sherbet night including that every region has its own traditions (Tan, 2012, p. 154) The last sentence foregrounds the fact that sherbet is a traditional drink consumed in Turkish culture.

Another strategy used by the translator is the strategy of calque which can be discussed through the example of the term “kebab”. This also exemplifies the globalization of Turkish food. As Cronin also put forth, food words often appear as calques in a language such as kebab, pizza, christmas pudding (2017, p. 48). In this novel, “kebab” is translated as “*kebab*” and “kebab dürüm” is translated as “kebab wrap” (Tan, 2012, p. 302) demonstrating the link between food and non-translation.

Omission is also adopted during the translation process in this work. Although “çay sofrası” (tea table) is a traditional habit commonly observed in Turkish culinary culture, this phrase is not translated into the target culture which can be considered as a significant cultural loss.

Another strategy witnessed in the translation of food items in this work is domestication. Similarly enough, in this work, the food item “hindistan cevizli kurabiye” is translated as “macaroon” (Tan, 2012, p. 62) which is thought as an equivalent for the term. “Macaroon” is of French origin and it sounds quite weird to use such a food item among the other cultural food items mainly belonging to the culinary culture of the south-eastern part of Turkey.

Lastly, Cronin stated that using parenthesis is common in the translation of food terms and there is one instance of this strategy in the translation of the novel. “Kaburga dolması” is transferred to the target culture firstly as “pistachios” (Tan, 2012, p. 177) and, then, the translator writes “(*kaburga dolması*)” in parenthesis and also in italics.

## 5. Conclusion

This study attempts to demonstrate the importance of the ecological environment of translation and the life of the texts in the translation process by emphasizing the dominant role the translator assumes during the transfer of the culinary culture of a source society. As Cronin put forward “understanding the full significance of what is on the table implies a degree of local knowledge that is acquired over time. Thus, one of the recurrent challenges for translators is to decode the language of food in terms of what it tells them about the social setting, cultural background, situation in time, religious or folk beliefs...” (2017, p. 62). In order to provide the food item which is cognitively equivalent for the target culture, the translator is required to have “prolonged immersion in a language and culture before the codes are to become in any way legible” (ibid.).

This study also reveals the fact that the strategies the translator adopts are very effective for making the food globalized or local. During translation, it is observed that the translator adopts the macro strategies of domestication and foreignization and the micro level ones such as footnote, explanation within the main text, calque, transference, and literal translation. No matter which strategy the translator uses, the target is to achieve communication between the two distinct cultures, either for providing and integrating a new concept into the target culture (a food item in this case) or making the text as close possible for the target audience. In both cases, the translator’s dominant position and his decisions play a central role in the end product.

As it can be observed in the analyzed food items, the translator chooses to be visible by using omission, providing explanations, footnotes, and revealing the ingredients which are the strategies making the food item foreignized. It can be concluded that the translator should be very careful while selecting from the translation ecology and translating the culinary culture as he has considerable potential to intervene and adopt strategies that make the target text either more domesticated or foreignized, to bring it closer to either the target or the source culture.

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