

Translation of Popular Culture Elements Between Domestication and Foreignization: *The Novel “Wind of the South” by Abdelhamid Benhedouga. Marcel Bois Translation as a Model*

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Abstract:

This article aims to shed light on the issue of translating elements of popular culture in literary texts, as they are characterized by a local nature that is often difficult to translate. The transfer is not merely linguistic but rather cultural, which constitutes a real challenge for the translator in order to convey the text with full cultural fidelity while taking into account the cultural specificities of the foreign reader. This pushes the translator to weigh between the two strategies of domestication and foreignization.

Through this research paper, we conducted an analytical and descriptive study of selected excerpts from the novel *Wind of the South* by Abdelhamid Benhedouga translated into French. We examined how the translator Marcel Bois handled the translation of popular culture elements into the target language, where he adopted the domestication strategy to ensure quality reception by the French reader, and chose foreignization to preserve the flavor

of the original text. Often, he resorts to combining the two strategies to preserve cultural specificity on one hand and address the target audience on the other.

Keywords : literary texts; popular culture; domestication; foreignization; Marcel Bois.

1- Introduction:

Translation serves as a link between different cultures and as a foundation for the civilizational development of peoples and nations. Literary translation—as a type of translation—has contributed to enriching this cultural diversity by transferring it from local to global contexts.

Undoubtedly, literary translation is a difficult and complex process, especially when it comes to transferring cultural elements of local nature (popular proverbs, customs, beliefs, rituals), as they are often hard to translate because they exceed the limits of linguistic transfer into the realm of cultural interpretation. They stem from the depth of the collective consciousness

of peoples and form the cultural identity of the original text.

Transferring popular cultural heritage in a novel presents a major challenge for the translator. The novel *Wind of the South* is a rich model reflecting the social and cultural environment of Algerian society. This requires the translator to deeply understand the structure of cultural discourse and its historical and social context. Therefore, decisive translation decisions must be made to convey the meaning with full cultural fidelity. The translator must either adopt domestication to bring the text closer to the target reader's culture by replacing cultural elements in the original text with equivalents in the target culture, or preserve the cultural specificity of the original text through foreignization, keeping its strangeness to encourage the reader to open to the culture of the other. Alternatively, a middle ground can be adopted by balancing the two strategies to achieve cultural fidelity and meet the target audience's expectations.

This leads us to the main research problem:

- How did the translator Marcel Bois handle the transfer of popular culture elements in the Algerian novel to the French reader? Which of the two strategies is more appropriate: domestication or foreignization?

Sub-questions include:

- What is meant by popular culture, and what are its main elements?

- What strategies and techniques did the translator employ as an intermediary between two different cultures?
- To what extent did the translator succeed in balancing the preservation of local character with bringing the text closer to the French reader?

This paper aims to define the concept of popular culture and its main elements, provide a conceptual framework for the strategies of domestication and foreignization in translation, and relate them to the translation of popular culture. The novel *Wind of the South* by Abdelhamid Benhedouga, translated into French, serves as the case study for our research.

2- Concept of Popular Culture:

2.1- Concept of Culture:

The term "culture" is one of those terms whose fixed and clear definition is difficult to determine due to the breadth of its content and diversity of its fields, as well as differing perspectives socially, anthropologically, and ideologically.

Mao Zedong defines it as "a reflection in terms of its concept of a particular society" (Ben Nabi, 2000, p. 33). From a Marxist perspective, culture is a mirror reflecting the reality of society as well as the patterns of thinking and behavior determined by the prevailing social system.

Malek Bennabi sees culture not merely as ideas and knowledge acquired by the individual in society but as "a set of moral qualities and

social values that influence the individual from birth and unconsciously become the relationship linking their behavior to the way of life in the environment in which they were born" (Arfiz Ali, 2023, p. 283).

The English scholar R.U. Saye defines culture more broadly to include all aspects of life, considering it: "every component encompassing all human activities and the results of these activities, beliefs, clothing, houses, food, language... and especially humans' ideas about the nature surrounding them" (Altamar, 2004, p. 9).

Thus, culture in general represents an integrated system of values, ways of thinking, and behavioral patterns that influence the formation of an individual's personality within the community and reflect the lived reality of a particular society.

2.2- Popular Culture:

To clarify the concept of popular culture, the term "popular" must first be defined. It is an adjective derived from "people," referring to the total cultural components arising from the depths of the people, accumulated through experiences and knowledge over a period of time (Ait Qasi Dhahbiya, p. 38). Accordingly, popular culture is: the folk heritage produced by the general public and consumed according to their needs and future vision under certain circumstances.

There is semantic ambiguity surrounding the term "popular culture," as it is linked to multiple overlapping concepts and appears

under different labels: "folk literature or material culture or folk heritage," which Abdelhamid Bouraïou refers to as "the material forming culture, including practices, ideas, forms of expression, customs, and traditions acquired by the individual from the group they belong to and passed down through generations" (Kaddour Dalila, p. 119).

This clearly indicates that popular culture, as collective memory, is acquired by individuals from generation to generation to ensure its continuity. It thus encompasses all activities, practices, and ideas produced by individuals to meet their material and psychological needs independently of authority or educated elites, and is transmitted orally and through memory (Bogota Abdullah, Abbasi Ibtisam, p. 5).

In this context, it is clear that popular culture draws its sources from the people, reflecting shared norms and daily interactions, away from politics, authority, or the elite class, i.e., the "high culture."

To distinguish between popular culture and elite culture, the former is deeply rooted in the masses, transmitted orally (customs, traditions, proverbs, legends, tales), while elite culture targets formal institutions that preserve it against extinction amid globalization challenges.

Thus, there exists a special culture using both elite and popular means of communication, embodied in the creations made by the people expressing their material and spiritual needs.

Accordingly, popular culture, as an intellectual heritage and carrier of civilizational and identity legacy, is closely linked to the people yet remains part of the global elite framework. It has adapted to development under globalization through technological means, while translation has served as a vital intermediary in promoting and disseminating popular culture and achieving cultural parity and dialogue between civilizations.

3- Elements of Popular Culture:

Mohamed El-Johary divides elements of popular culture into **material elements**, mainly including traditional clothing, food, buildings, and urbanism, and **non-material elements**, represented in customs, popular beliefs, and elements of folk literature such as proverbs, popular language, and folk tales (El-Johary, 1978, p. 10).

Accordingly, this paper will focus on some popular cultural elements that serve the practical side of the study.

3.1- Popular Proverbs:

A popular proverb is one of the verbal arts, summarizing long human experiences and situations. It reflects societal values, customs, and worldview, transmitted orally until it becomes entrenched in the minds of the general public. Sokolov defines it as: "a concise expression, commonly circulated among people, easily flowing on the tongue in everyday language, characterized by figurative style, good wording, and strong meaning" (Mohamed Amin, 2014, p. 29).

This definition highlights the main features of a proverb: brevity, common usage, rapid circulation among social layers, and rhetorical power. A proverb is born of the environment in which it emerged and is often used to express a particular social incident experienced by people, circulating in similar situations across time.

Thus, a popular proverb is a traditional saying, author unknown, addressing various social situations, orally transmitted, with concise wording and eloquent meaning, reflecting various life aspects in it.

3.2- Popular Language (Colloquial):

Language is one of the most important elements of popular culture. Ibn Jinni defined it as: "sounds by which each people expresses their lands" (Ibn Jinni, p.33). Language is an expressive medium for daily communication to meet material and psychological needs.

It is known that every country has a linguistic duality, mainly the standard language or the elite language of society, while colloquial or popular language is the language created by ordinary people, i.e., the lower social classes, for daily use. From this perspective, colloquial language is: "the language of oral communication and ordinary speech with ordinary people without adherence to the rules of standard language, grammar, and syntax, characterized by accent and error, differing from one environment to another" (Fathi Anwar Abdelmajid El-Dabouli, 1990, p. 761).

In Algerian popular culture, colloquial language can branch into different dialects due to geographical, social, and individual factors: for example, Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern dialects.

From this, it is evident that colloquial language derives mainly from the standard language and includes dialectical differences. It is mainly used for daily communication and serves as a vehicle for transmitting a rich folk heritage.

3.3- Popular Customs and Traditions:

Customs and traditions form an inseparable part of a people's culture and civilizational belonging, as each region has its customs and traditions even within one nation.

To accurately define the concept, it is necessary to distinguish between the two terms. A custom primarily arises from individual behavior through daily repetition. Sumner defined a popular custom as: "the ways and customs of the people, meaning the hidden rules of behavior whose violation leads to a clash with what is expected by the common opinion of the community" (Khalil, Sarqama, 2019, p. 22).

Consequently, a social custom can encompass the total practices and behavioral patterns that society imposes on its members for adherence. Due to the repeated use of a custom and its sedimentation in popular consciousness over a long period, it becomes a tradition. Here, tradition refers to a social act that imitates the behavior of ancestors and is transmitted from one generation to the next.

From this perspective, it is clear that customs and traditions express cultural specificities reflecting the social environment. Undoubtedly, Algerian society, like other societies, possesses a rich cultural heritage of customs and traditions that highlight its unique character and identity. This is manifested in religious and national celebrations, marriage and burial ceremonies, and circumcision parties.

4- Domestication and Foreignization in Translation:

The terms "domestication and foreignization" fall within postcolonial translation studies. This binary has shifted translation from a linguistic issue to a cultural and political approach aimed at overcoming degrading cultural hierarchies.

The American linguist Laurence Venuti is among the first translation theorists to detail the strategies of domestication and foreignization in his famous work *The Translator's Invisibility*. A translator resorts to either domestication or foreignization to preserve the characteristics of the source or target culture according to cultural or subjective considerations of the translator or the translation recipient (Obeidi Mohamed Chouchani, 2020, p. 338).

Domestication (Domestication) in translation refers to concealing everything foreign in the source culture and replacing it with what is familiar in the target culture. This strategy aims to reduce the strangeness of the source

text so it becomes familiar to the target reader, aligning with their cultural and ideological identity.

Foreignization (Foreignization) in translation refers to conveying the text based on cultural and linguistic differences, generating a sense of strangeness for the target reader, thereby allowing them to access another culture.

In this context, Venuti adopts the idea of the German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher in defining domestication and foreignization. Schleiermacher acknowledged two approaches in translation, stating:

"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 writer toward him." (Pym, 2012, p. 14)

This statement illustrates that Schleiermacher—a proponent of foreignization—presents the translator with two choices: either adopt foreignization, preserving the cultural and linguistic specificity of the source text despite its strangeness, focusing on the author and their cultural background, or adopt domestication, prioritizing the target reader, seeking familiar words and expressions in the target language, even if this modifies the original text's features.

5- Translating Popular Cultural Elements: Domestication or Foreignization?

The question of domestication and foreignization in translating cultural elements

has sparked wide debate among critics and translation theorists due to its close relation to a specific cultural and linguistic context. Some advocate domesticating the cultural dimension to match the customs, traditions, and culture of the target reader, while others recommend foreignization to preserve the original features of the translated text, even if it seems strange to the target reader.

In this regard, Venuti describes domestication as aiming to produce a transparent and fluent text that reduces the strangeness of the foreign text for the target reader (Venuti, 1995, p. 20). Venuti critiques domestication, seeing it as an ethnic reduction of the foreign text into the cultural values of the target language. Therefore, he proposes foreignization as an alternative, considering it a form of resistance against ethnocentrism, bias, cultural narcissism, and imperialism (Venuti, 1995, p. 20).

Domestication, then, signifies rejecting the other, denying them access to the original, and reshaping the text to align with the dominant values of the target culture, which reduces cultural diversity and reinforces Anglo-American culture at the expense of others.

Conversely, Eugene Nida supports domestication, emphasizing that language should not interfere with the target text. By reducing the strangeness of the original, the translator elicits an equivalent response in the target text, achieving the principle of equivalent effect. Nida sees translation as

successful when the target text meets the cultural expectations of the target audience (Nida, 1964, p. 31). He distinguishes between two types of equivalence: formal and dynamic. Antoine Berman shares Venuti's view, promoting foreignization and literal translation in his book *The Experience of the Foreign*, defining translation as:

"La traduction est la traduction de la lettre, du texte en tant qu'il est lettre." (Berman, 1999, p. 25)

Berman stresses that the text is primarily a linguistic construct, and literal translation does not necessarily mean word-for-word substitution. Newmark concurs, emphasizing literal translation to transfer cultural elements without alteration or resorting to target language equivalents (Newmark, 1988, p. 47). Given these differing perspectives, Sun adopts a neutral stance, stating that successful translation requires combining domestication and foreignization, maintaining both as a "golden rule" for every translator. Jianghua supports this view, noting that domestication and foreignization complement each other without conflict and cannot be ignored (Nawaz, 2014, p. 64).

In light of the above, translating popular cultural elements is more cultural and social than linguistic. A competent translator must adopt a balanced approach between domestication and foreignization without stripping the text of its originality or cultural identity, relying on both strategies according to

the linguistic and cultural context and target audience requirements.

6- Classification of Translation Techniques Based on Domestication and Foreignization:

The theorists Vinay and Darbelnet developed a clear methodology for translation in their book *Comparative Stylistics of French and English*, which facilitates the translator's work to overcome obstacles and achieve fluent and acceptable translation. They proposed a set of translation procedures (Vinay, 1972, pp. 46–54), classified according to the strategy adopted in advance (domestication or foreignization):

Domestication translation techniques (indirect translation, Traduction directe):

- Transposition
- Modulation
- Adaptation
- Equivalence

Foreignization translation techniques (direct translation, Traduction Oblique):

- Borrowing
- Calque
- Literal translation

7- Applied Models from Translating Popular Cultural Elements in *Wind of the South*, Marcel Bois as a Model:

This section applies the theoretical elements (popular culture translation) to selected excerpts from *Wind of the South* by Algerian novelist Abdelhamid Benhedouga. The aim is to analyze how French translator Marcel Bois

handled these elements using techniques and strategies to convey popular cultural elements to the foreign reader.

7.1- Translating Popular Proverbs:

Example 1:

Original Text	Translated Text
لا يا بنيّتي. المثل يقول: "لا تمشي الأرجل إلا حيث يحب القلب"، وأنا أحبكم". ص 36	Ma fille, tu connais le proverbe "Les pieds vont où le cœur aime". Je vous aime. P 33

This proverb appears in the novel spoken by the old woman Rahma during her visit to Malik's house. It is used in Algerian society to indicate love and strong attachment to places and people. The meaning is that what drives a person in life comes from the heart—a metaphor shared across cultures.

Marcel Bois relied on a literal translation of the proverb *Les pieds vont où le cœur aime*, likely due to the lack of an exact equivalent in French. He preserved the linguistic structure of the Arabic proverb, with a slight adjustment:

removing the negation "لا تمشي" and replacing it with a declarative construction using the verb "vont," which adds stylistic elegance, making the translation smooth and understandable.

Bois applied foreignization in translating the proverb to convey meaning and imagery to the French reader, choosing a phrase familiar in French culture but retaining the linguistic and cultural specificity of the Arabic proverb. Thus, he largely succeeded in transferring the symbolic and emotional dimension of the proverb to the target culture

Example 2:

Original Text	Translated Text
إيه يا بنيّتي! المثل يقول: "ما يدري بالمزود غير اللي اضرب بيه وإلا أنضرب"، ص 16	Helas, ma fille, le proverbe a raison: 'Seul l'arbre battu des vents connaît réellement la tempête'. P.18

This proverb is common in Algerian folk culture, with the metaphorical meaning that one cannot judge a person's suffering except through personal experience.

The translator did not use a literal translation, as it would not convey the meaning. Instead, he used cultural adaptation by finding an equivalent in the target culture. Here, the

translator focused on meaning rather than exact wording.

Bois domesticated the proverb to bring the meaning closer to the target audience at the expense of the local cultural specificity, effectively erasing the original identity of the Arabic proverb.

A foreignized alternative could retain the word "mezoued" (a bag carrying flour symbolizing beating in Algerian culture):

Seul celui qui a été frappé par le mezoued en connaît la douleur

This preserves the proverb's strangeness and introduces the reader to a new cultural element.

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Example 1: The word "قهواجي"

Original Text	Translated Text
وهكذا عندما انتهت الحرب... ففتح المقهى أواسط سنة 1920، ومنذ ذلك الوقت وهو قهواجي. ص187	Depuis l'ouverture de son établissement au milieu de l'année 1920, il était le kahouadji. le cafetier. P 155

"قهواجي" is a common colloquial term in Algerian popular culture, of Turkish origin with the suffix "aji," indicating a profession or trade, meaning "coffee maker" or "coffee seller." It carries deep cultural significance beyond linguistic meaning, viewed as a social figure with an important role in Algerian social and cultural life.

Marcel Bois translated "قهواجي" into French as (*le Kahouadji, le cafetier*), combining borrowing via phonetic and literal transfer

Example 2: The phrase "عام البون"

Original Text	Translated Text
مات "عام البون" (تقسيط بيع المواد الغذائية) ص 28	Il est mort l'année des bons" P. 27

"عام البون" or "Year of the Bon" is a popular phrase rooted in Algerian local imagination, referring to a rationing system imposed by French authorities on Algerians from 1944 until the end of WWII. "Bon" refers to ration

Bois succeeded in conveying the precise meaning (suffering and trial) but dissolved the original cultural element (mezoued), substituting symbols familiar to French readers (tree, winds, storm).

7.2- Translating Colloquial Words

("kahouaji") with a functional equivalent in French ("le cafetier," defined in *Larousse* as "Le cafetier: qui tient un café").

Bois used a hybrid strategy: foreignization to highlight local and popular character, and domestication to provide clarity for the French reader unfamiliar with the cultural meaning of "kahouadji." Using only "cafetier" would have stripped the term of its cultural specificity and popular character.

coupons or bonds provided to citizens to regulate the purchase of basic goods.

The translator Marcel Bois relied on the foreignization approach in rendering the phrase "عام البون" as "année des bons." In this example, the translator resorted to a quasi-

literal translation, keeping the same syntactic structure: "عام" → "année" and "البون" → "des bons." It is noticeable that Bois preserved the cultural specificity of the word "bons," which is a French loanword in Arabic, leaving a sense of strangeness for the reader who may be unaware of its meaning in Algerian dialect.

The translator added an explanatory translation in a footnote to remove semantic ambiguity, using *carte alimentaire*, a ration card used in France during the German occupation. This attempt to find a cultural context similar to that of the original text to approximate the meaning

for the target reader demonstrates the translator's awareness of the historical and social contexts of both cultures.

Through his translation of the phrase "عام البون" as "année des bons," it appears that Marcel Bois was fully aware of the cultural gap between the French reader and the source text. He chose foreignization to convey the phrase with cultural fidelity, while also adding a footnote explanation (*carte alimentaire*) to ensure comprehension, consistent with the foreignization strategy that resists cultural domination in the target language

Example 3: The word "الدشرة"

Original Text	Translated Text
اليوم السوق، الدشرة خالية، كل الناس تسوقوا... ص 21	Le hameau est vide. Tout le monde est au marché aujourd'hui. P. 22
أذهب حالا إلى الدشرة فأخبر أباك، إنه بالمقهى. ص 160	Rejoint tout de suite ton père qui est au café, à la "dechra". P. 134

The word "الدشرة" in Arabic dictionaries refers to a small village or rural settlement. It carries deep cultural reference in Algerian society, denoting a cultural space whose members share customs, traditions, rituals, and social bonds.

Referring to the context of the novel, the translator rendered "الدشرة" as the French equivalent *le hameau*, meaning "village." Here, he applied domestication by replacing the original term with a culturally familiar element in the target language. This ensures comprehension for the French reader but may strip the word of its cultural connotations present in the original text, which *hameau* in

French may not convey (only a geographical space).

Elsewhere in the novel, the translator chose to foreignize his translation by using the borrowing technique, rendering "الدشرة" phonetically as *dechra*. Notice that Bois retained the cultural feature and local flavor of "الدشرة," emphasizing the "otherness" in the original text.

What draws attention is that the translator combined the two strategies: domestication (*le hameau*) for clarity and comprehension, and foreignization (*dechra*) to convey the word with full cultural fidelity, aiming to create a shared lexicon with the reader through the text.

7.3 Translating Words and Phrases Related to Customs and Traditions:

Example 1: The phrase "طعام الأسبوع"

Original Text	Translated Text
لقد عشت أجيالا من الناس، وأكلت من طعام أسبوع مولد أبيك رحمه الله، ص 191	J'en ai connu des générations. J'ai même mangé le couscous pour la fête du huitième jour, lors de la naissance de ton père. P. 158

The phrase "طعام الأسبوع" or "حفل السبوع" in Algerian usage refers to a special celebration held on the seventh day after a child's birth. Its origin traces back to ancient Egyptian civilization, symbolizing joy at the arrival of a newborn, with certain rituals performed.

The word "السبوع" derives from the number "seven," carrying special symbolic meaning for ancient Egyptians, and this tradition has been passed down through generations across Arab countries such as Algeria, Sudan, and Morocco.

In translating "طعام الأسبوع," the translator chose domestication, adapting the cultural event by finding an equivalent in the target culture (*le couscous pour la fête du huitième jour*). Here, Bois translated "الطعام" as *fête*, indicating the celebration, and "أسبوع" as *huitième jour*, which carries special symbolic meaning in Christian culture (circumcision).

Example 2: The word "الفدوة"

Original Text	Translated Text
فإن كانت تلزمك حاجة اشترها لك في طريقي من أحد الدكاكين لأن الفدوة نجريها هناك... ص 197	J'achèterai en chemin ce dont nous aurons besoin pour la fadwa que nous accomplirons là-bas... P. 163

In this example, the translator rendered "الفدوة" as *Fadwa*, choosing to borrow the word phonetically.

Bois did not use a literal translation but opted for a familiar French expression, creating smoothness and comprehension for the French reader. This choice may be due to differences in time reckoning between cultures: the Arabic count starts from the day of birth, while in Western culture it starts the following day, which could confuse the reader culturally. Consequently, the word "السبوع," with its cultural reference in Algerian society, loses its religious, ritual, and social dimension.

Bois succeeded in approximating meaning for the French reader but at the same time erased the religious and ritual specificity of the occasion. The better approach would have been to foreignize the term *Seboû* and include an explanation in the text or footnote, thus imparting cultural awareness of the celebration to the French reader.

In Algerian popular culture, *الفدوة* is part of Sufi traditions inherited in some regions of Algeria after a person's burial, involving Qur'an

recitation, food offerings as charity for the deceased's soul, and prayers.

The translator chose foreignization (*Fadwa*) due to the lack of an equivalent in French, preserving the word's cultural and religious dimension. While this respects the original text's specificity, it introduces cultural strangeness for the French reader. To ensure comprehension and readability in the target language, he added a footnote explanation. The translator could have domesticated the word using a French equivalent, e.g., *sacrifice*, which would have stripped the word of its religious and popular content.

Bois preferred to approximate his translation (*Fadwa*) to preserve cultural impact and flavor, providing an artistic translation of the original text, with a footnote explaining *Fadwa* to clarify the concept and imagery for the target reader.

8- Conclusion:

In conclusion, this research paper focused on the issue of translating popular cultural elements in postcolonial Algerian novels. Our analysis of Marcel Bois's translation shows how he handled these cultural elements, oscillating between domestication and foreignization strategies. He faced a dual challenge: preserving the original text's cultural specificity while considering the comprehension and readability for the foreign reader.

From this study, we can draw several conclusions:

- Popular culture represents the intellectual heritage embedded in the memory of the community, aiming to preserve its identity and civilizational belonging through practices, values, behavioral and expressive patterns, including customs, traditions, popular language, proverbs, and beliefs.
- The translator employed domestication strategies to reduce the cultural gap and approximate meaning for the target reader, using transposition, equivalence, and adaptation techniques.
- The translator also applied foreignization for popular cultural elements, taking the reader toward the source language, preserving the cultural specificity of the original text despite its strangeness, employing literal translation, borrowing, and explanatory translation techniques.
- Marcel Bois combined domestication and foreignization strategies in translating cultural elements, reflecting his awareness of the cultural and social context of both linguistic systems.
- The translator often succeeded in conveying popular cultural elements to the foreign reader, aiming to approximate meaning, though he sometimes failed due to linguistic and cultural considerations.

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