

# ***Translation Strategies of Domestication: A Study of English-Chinese Translation by Taking the Translation Techniques in Harry Potter as an Example***

**Junqian Li**

*Faculty of European Languages and Cultures, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies,  
Guangzhou, China  
luciuslee0914@163.com*

**Abstract.** Domestication strategy is an imperative component of translation practice. Along with people's demand for high-quality translation, this theory has also been constantly evolving with translation practice. Taking the English-Chinese translation of Harry Potter as an example, systematically summarize and introduce relevant translation strategies of domestication, and evaluate the merits and demerits, and look forward to future application and research prospects. The mastery of domestication strategy is essential in translation studies, as it prioritizes target-culture norms and reader expectations, enhancing the textual fluency and cultural accessibility. This approach facilitates effective cross-cultural communication by minimizing foreignness as well as preserving core meaning, underscoring its significance in both theoretical and practical translation research. This essay first introduces the definition of domestication translation strategy, and then elaborates on it in detail from three aspects: liberal translation, imitation and variation translation. Meanwhile, by citing specific examples from the English-Chinese translations of Harry Potter, readers can further deepen their understandings.

**Keywords:** Domestication, Liberal translation, Variation translation, Harry Potter, English-Chinese translation

## **1. Introduction**

In the second half of the 20th century, academic circles no longer confined translation studies to the linguistic level of equivalence but strove to seek balance in the social, cultural, and ideological aspects of the target language and the source language to achieve better translation effects. Lawrence Venuti first introduced the pair of translation concepts, domestication and foreignization, in his book *The Translator's Invisibility* [1]. Meanwhile, the continuous development of globalization, while promoting cultural exchange, also intensifies the risk of cultural homogenization. Therefore, the domestication translation strategy serves as an important product for achieving the localization of cultural products in the context of globalization. By studying the domestication translation strategy, it not only helps to deepen the understanding of the essence of translation, striving to achieve the unity of cultural negotiation and power game in language conversion, but also can build a more

comprehensive translation evaluation system to better promote cross-disciplinary integration and expand the academic boundaries of translation studies.

However, in the field of translation studies, there is a lack of systematic integration of specific branches under the strategy of domestication. The existing theoretical frameworks are mainly based on the cultural context of Europe and America and mostly come from the mutual translation between languages within the Indo-European language family, such as English, French, Spanish, etc. The depth of research on domestication in the translation between Chinese, Arabic, etc, and Western languages is insufficient. Honestly, the practical application of domestication translation in English-Chinese translation often has a problem: it tends to ignore the inherent cultural characteristics and historical evolution track behind the Chinese context, and the flexible control on the dynamic level is obviously insufficient. It's clear that this aspect needs significant strengthening. After all, studying domestication translation shouldn't be confined to a single field. We can totally draw on and integrate theoretical achievements from other disciplines, the research findings in fields like cognitive linguistics and communication studies are all usable. Then, by riding the wave of technological changes in the digital age, we can truly make domestication research better serve translation theory and practical application.

Starting from this point, this essay first takes the brief introduction to domestication translation theory in Xiong Bing's [2] *Conceptual Confusion in Translation Studies: Taking "Translation Strategies", "Translation Methods" and "Translation Techniques" as Examples* as the foundation. Then it gradually explains the specific content of domestication theory and the practical key points in translation practice in detail. At the same time, it will specifically analyze what kind of readability and cultural transmission effect have been achieved through the translation of some specific cultural terms under the existing domestication theoretical framework. It also attempts to conduct a systematic sorting and integration of the various branches of domestication strategies and their application cases in English-Chinese translation. Besides that, it will take the domestication translation cases from *Harry Potter* as an entry point to thoroughly explore the specific application logic of such strategies in Chinese translation practice.

## 2. Definition of translation strategies domestication

Domestication, originally proposed by Lawrence Venuti in his book *The Translator's Invisibility* [1], refers to a method centered on the cultural habits of target language readers in translation strategies. The core is to eliminate the sense of exoticism of the original text as much as possible, make the translation read like an original work in the target language, and reduce readers' sense of unfamiliarity with foreign cultures. Compared to foreignization, it prioritizes targeted culture language, aiming to facilitate readers' acceptance. Widely utilized in popular texts, this strategy translates the source language's cultural concepts, such as customs, allusions, metaphors, and values, into the corresponding expressions in the target language culture.

In English-Chinese translation, several novels embody this idea. For example, in *Harry Potter*, through creative localization, the translator has reduced the reading comprehension barriers for Chinese readers caused by cultural differences. Here are four categories in *Harry Potter* using domestication translation [3]. Below is the table that simply analyzes these corresponding relations.

Table 1. Examples, classification and illustration of domestication strategy in Harry Potter translation

| Category                                                                           | English version                 | Domestication Translation | Illustration                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cultural images substitution                                                       | Pumpkin Pastries                | 南瓜馅饼                      | Seeking common Chinese pastry names to replace traditional British pastries to facilitate readers' understanding of specific terms. |
|                                                                                    | Treacle Tart                    | 糖浆水果馅饼                    |                                                                                                                                     |
| Localization of names of magical creatures                                         | Hippogriff                      | 鹰头马身有翼兽                   | Combining literal translation and the ancient Chinese word formation method (similar to the naming in Shan Hai Jing)                |
|                                                                                    | Basillisk                       | 蛇怪                        |                                                                                                                                     |
| Translate incantations through domestication art of integrating sound and meaning. | Expelliarm                      | 除你武器                      | Strengthen the sense of action with the four-character dynamic guest structure.                                                     |
|                                                                                    | Obliviate                       | 一忘皆空                      |                                                                                                                                     |
| Reinvent the Proverbs                                                              | I'm all ears                    | 洗耳恭听                      | Abandon literal translation and call the Chinese idiom and slang library to achieve equivalent expression.                          |
|                                                                                    | You're a chip off the old block | 有其父必有其子                   |                                                                                                                                     |

Given above, domestication, as a common approach existing in advertisements, juvenile literature, and novels, is capable of improving readability and enhancing the affinity of translation. Hence, this essay will continue to introduce relevant theories and a more specific classification of domestication.

### 3. Translation strategies of liberal translation based on domestication

Liberal translation refers to the translation process of not sticking to the words, grammatical structure, or even superficial form of the original text, but in-depth understanding of the deep meaning, intention, style, emotion, and cultural connotation of the original text, and then looking for the most natural and most appropriate expression that can cause the same feelings and reactions in the target readers in the target language. It pursues the similarity in spirit but not in form, emphasizing the accurate transmission of meaning and the reciprocity of communication effect, in contrast to literal translation, which pays more attention to word-by-word correspondence and retention of formal structure.

When encountering culture-specific items, poetry, movies, slang, and advertisements in translation practice, liberal translation is widely applied to gap the barrier of understanding, especially in the translation of puns and internet buzzwords in specific cultural contexts that require the use of paraphrasing to effectively convey the meaning [4]. In the practice of liberal translation, we usually reorganize and reconstruct the cultural images in the original text by retaining the core meaning and discarding the original ones in the translation or make explanatory conversions so as to conform to the expression habits, grammatical rules, and rhetorical uses of the target language, making the translation more idiomatic and fluent.

This technique is clearly reflected in the English-Chinese translation of Harry Potter. For example, the incantation "Expecto Patronum", the literal meaning of the Latin phrase, is I expect a guardian (我期待一个守护者). However, the translator completely disregarded the literal meaning of the Latin text and captured the essence of this incantation: summon a guardian composed of positive forces. In the ultimate Chinese version, the four words (呼神护卫) are forceful and evocative, rich in visual and dynamic impact, perfectly conveying the effect and emotional power of the spell, far surpassing any literal or phonetic translation in terms of shock value and alignment with the context of Chinese magic.

In conclusion, liberal translation is a strategy that centers on the target language readers and aims for equivalent meaning and effect. It grants the translator the necessary flexibility to adjust the form and adapt to the culture, thus freeing the translation from the constraints of the source language structure and allowing it to take on a new life in the target context to achieve effective communication. However, paraphrasing is by no means arbitrary rewriting [5]; its core lies in a profound understanding of the essence of the original text and creative transformation based on that understanding.

#### 4. Translation strategies of imitation based on domestication

In the strategy of domestication translation, imitation is a special and highly domesticated approach. It goes beyond simple language conversion and aims to create a sense of originality in the target language cultural context, making the translation read as if it were originally written in the target language rather than a translated work [6]. It aims to reproduce the core spirit, artistic effect, or function of the original text in the target language culture, making it conform to the cultural habits, aesthetic expectations, and acceptance capacity of the target language readers. During this process, the translator enjoys a great deal of freedom and can significantly adjust, add, delete, rewrite, or even recreate the content, form, style, cultural imagery, and other elements of the original text. So it can be said that imitation is one of the most extreme manifestations of domestication strategies.

In different versions of Harry Potter in Chinese, imitation has been clearly reflected. In Chinese, it is often avoided to use long compound words to describe things. Translating "you-know-who" as "神秘人" instead of "你知道是谁" fits the Chinese taboo habit. What's more, in regard to the translation of the incantation "Wingardium Leviosa", the translation versions of the Taiwan region of China and mainland of China are poles apart. The Taiwanese version adopts a direct transliteration approach, translating it as "温咖癡啦唯啊萨", while the translation version on the mainland China utilizes the combination of meaning representation and phonetic translation, translating it as "羽加迪姆勒维奥萨". Among them, the character "羽" is used to imply the floating meaning of the incantation, enabling readers to better understand the specific function of the incantation. This phenomenon also reflects the distinct styles of different translators in their translation practices.

From what has been introduced above, when the cultural background, values, and expression methods of the original text differ greatly from those of the target culture, neither literal translation nor free translation can be accepted or understood; using the strategy of imitation translation can convey the core emotions to the greatest extent. Or, when wordplay in the original text cannot be directly transplanted, it is often necessary to create new jokes or puns in the target language that have a similar effect.

However, some argue that the use of imitation translation strategies may not be faithful enough to the original text, possibly distorting the author's original intention or losing cultural features or details. It may also completely eliminate the heterogeneity of the original text, preventing readers from experiencing the cultural background and unique charm of the original work, which requires us to view and apply this translation strategy holistically.

#### 5. Translation strategies of variation translation based on domestication

Variation translation is the most frequently used, prominent, and sometimes most controversial specific operation method under the domestication translation strategy. It refers to the conscious adjustment, alteration, or even replacement of the content, form, image, and allusions of the source text to adapt to the language habits, cultural norms, aesthetic tastes, or ideologies of the target

language [7]. Generally, culture-specific items used in the source language, such as idioms and proverbs, may be completely absent, which makes the context difficult to understand or evokes negative associations in the target language culture. Some details, background information, and secondary plots in the source text may seem lengthy, irrelevant, or hard to understand to the target language readers, or they may involve sensitive cultural, political, or religious topics. Under such circumstance, translators should delete, merge, and simplify the minor content as well as keep the core information unchanged [8]. Hence, variation translation is applied in these situations.

Let's cite concrete expression in Harry Potter as an example. When dealing with "NEWTs (Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Tests)", a direct translation of it would be "令人讨厌的,令人疲惫的魔法测试". However, the translator gave up the pun "Nastily Exhausting" in the original text, as a literal translation would be overly long and lose the formality of the exam's name. And the term "终极" is used to emphasize its high difficulty and significance, while "考试" is used to clarify its nature, coming to a result "终极巫师考试" by using variation translation. Also, the word "N.E.W.T." itself means "newt", but this pun is completely lost in the translated name, which is the price of the variation translation.

Variation translation is a method under the domestication strategy, which consciously adjusts, alters, or substitutes the language form, cultural imagery, content details, or pragmatic approach of the source text to achieve naturalness, fluency, and acceptability of the target text in the target culture. It aims to bridge the cultural gap and pursue functional equivalence and similarity in reader response [9]. Its core lies in changing the external form while retaining the core meaning and effect. However, the translator must carefully balance the degree of adaptation, seeking a compromise between eliminating cultural barriers and remaining faithful to the original text, and avoid cultural distortion or meaning distortion caused by excessive domestication.

## 6. Conclusion

When it comes to the practical application of the domestication strategy in translation, what matters more is bringing together different translation methods to further polish the translation quality. This essay dives deeper into the branching translation methods under the domestication strategy, arguing that we need to draw clear lines between these three concepts: liberal translation, imitation, and variation translation. The hope is that this helps clear up the confusion translation enthusiasts often have around these terms, and ultimately contributes more meaningfully to the development of translation studies.

While this article has arrived at some valuable conclusions through sorting out domestication and foreignization strategies, we've got to acknowledge its limitations and these actually point the way for more in-depth research down the line. One major limitation is that the case selection is a bit limited in terms of target languages; it mostly focuses on English-Chinese translations from the Harry Potter series, and there's a lack of specific analysis on multi-genre texts. That means readers might struggle to find useful translation references when they're doing domestication work on other types of texts, like advertisements or movies. Another notable issue is that, because the Harry Potter series covers a relatively narrow range of themes, the application of cultural background elements unique to Chinese isn't very comprehensive. On top of that, the lack of interdisciplinary integration analysis is another challenge this study hasn't fully addressed.

So future research can zero in on fixing these gaps, for example, sorting through and summing up domestication practices across different subject areas, or conducting in-depth analysis of domestication theory by incorporating the latest theoretical frontiers from fields like cognitive

linguistics or communication studies. This is going to be a key goal for the author's future work in translation studies.

## References

- [1] Venuti, L. (2017). *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation*. Routledge.
- [2] Xiong Bing. Conceptual Confusion in Translation Studies: Taking "Translation Strategies", "Translation Methods" and "Translation Techniques" as Examples [J] *Chinese translation*, 2014, 35(03): 82-88/
- [3] Duan Xuehui. The Application of Domestication and Foreignization in the Literary Translation of Harry Potter [J]. *Masterpieces Appreciation*, 2025, (11): 22-24.DOI: 10.20273/
- [4] Yang Qiangliuli. A Brief Analysis of the Application of Literal Translation and Free Translation in the Chinese Translation of Film Titles [C]// *Western Sichuan Literature Compilation and Translation Research Center. Research on the Development and Innovation of Foreign Language Education and Translation (17)*. Chengdu University of Foreign Languages, 2025: 276-279.DOI: 10.26914/
- [5] Chen Weiwei, Wu Jiajia. Dynamic and Unified Perspective on Literal and Free Translation of English [J]. *Journal of Chifeng University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 2024, 45(12): 96-99.DOI: 10.13398/
- [6] Zhang Shunsheng, Ni Xiuqing. Translating by Paraphrasing, Imitating and Creating (Part One) - Three Methods of English-Chinese Translation [J]. *English World*, 2023, 42(08): 97-100/
- [7] Lanza G C , Castro G C .Revision and retranslation of children's classics in modern-day UK and Spain: The case of Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five* and *Malory Towers* [J].*Perspectives*, 2024, 32(6): 1098-1114/
- [8] Shi Y , Haroon H .The shift of functions via retranslation and revision: an analysis of the paratexts of three Chinese translations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* [J].*Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies*, 2024, 11(3): 294-311/
- [9] Wang Y .Retranslation of *The Analects of Confucius* and the Causes for Retranslation [J].*Journal of Art, Culture and Philosophical Studies*, 2024, 1(1)/