

FOREIGNIZATION AND DOMESTICATION IN THE TRANSLATION OF HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

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Abstract. The translation of historical documents requires a careful balance between preserving the cultural and linguistic identity of the source text and ensuring accessibility for modern readers. This article examines the application of foreignization and domestication as two major translation strategies in rendering historical documents. Foreignization retains culture-specific terms, historical references, and linguistic features to preserve the authenticity of the original text, whereas domestication adapts these elements to the target culture for greater readability and comprehension. Through the analysis of selected historical texts and their English translations, the study explores the advantages and limitations of both approaches. The findings demonstrate that neither strategy is universally effective; rather, translators should adopt a context-sensitive approach that considers the document's historical significance, target audience, and communicative purpose. The research concludes that an appropriate combination of foreignization and domestication enables translators to maintain historical authenticity while facilitating intercultural understanding. This balanced strategy contributes to the accurate transmission of historical knowledge and cultural heritage across languages.

Keywords: foreignization, domestication, historical documents, translation strategies, cultural transfer, historical authenticity, intercultural communication, translation studies.

Historical documents represent invaluable sources of cultural memory, political development, social organization, and linguistic evolution. They include royal decrees, legal codes, diplomatic correspondence, religious manuscripts, treaties, chronicles, and other archival materials that reflect the historical realities of a particular period. Translating such documents is a complex task because it requires not only linguistic competence but also extensive knowledge of historical, cultural, and ideological contexts. Unlike contemporary texts, historical documents often contain archaic vocabulary, obsolete grammatical structures, culture-specific references, and historical concepts that may have no direct equivalents in the target language. One of the central debates in translation studies concerns the choice between foreignization and domestication when translating culturally bound texts. Foreignization seeks to preserve the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the source text, allowing readers

to experience the historical and cultural distance of the original. In contrast, domestication adapts the text to the linguistic and cultural expectations of the target audience, making it more accessible and comprehensible. Both strategies play an important role in the translation of historical documents, yet their application depends on the purpose of the translation, the intended readership, and the nature of the historical material. Historical documents demand a careful balance between faithfulness to the original and readability in the target language. Excessive domestication may obscure historical and cultural realities, while excessive foreignization can make the text difficult for readers to understand. Therefore, translators must make informed decisions that preserve historical authenticity without sacrificing clarity.

This study examines the use of foreignization and domestication in the translation of historical documents. It aims to analyze how these strategies influence the representation of historical realities, cultural identity, and reader comprehension. By discussing authentic examples from translated historical texts, the article highlights practical approaches that enable translators to achieve an effective balance between cultural preservation and communicative accessibility.

Literature review. The concepts of foreignization and domestication have become central to contemporary translation studies, particularly in the translation of culturally and historically significant texts. Although these strategies have been widely discussed in literary translation, their application to historical documents has received increasing scholarly attention due to the growing demand for accurate translations of archival materials, legal manuscripts, chronicles, and diplomatic records. Lawrence Venuti (1995) introduced the distinction between foreignization and domestication as two contrasting translation strategies. He argued that foreignization deliberately preserves linguistic and cultural differences, encouraging readers to recognize the foreign identity of the source text rather than assimilating it into the target culture. Domestication, by contrast, adapts the text to the linguistic and cultural norms of the target audience, making it more fluent and accessible. Venuti maintained that excessive domestication may conceal important cultural and historical features of the original text. Susan Bassnett (2014) emphasizes that historical texts cannot be separated from the cultural and political environments in which they were produced. According to her, translators of historical documents should consider not only lexical equivalence but also historical context, ideology, and cultural memory. This perspective suggests that translation functions as a bridge between different historical periods rather than a simple linguistic transfer. Jeremy Munday (2022) notes that translation strategies should be selected according to the communicative purpose of the translation and the expectations of the intended readership. In the case of historical documents, he argues that translators often combine foreignization and domestication rather than relying

exclusively on one approach. Such a balanced strategy allows translators to preserve culturally significant terminology while ensuring readability. Anthony Pym (2014) views translation as an intercultural activity that involves negotiation between cultures. He argues that historical references, administrative titles, and legal terminology frequently require explanatory translation techniques because direct lexical equivalents are often unavailable. This view supports the use of selective domestication together with explanatory notes when translating historical sources. Recent research has further expanded this discussion. Karpińska, Jiao, and colleagues (2024) argue that advances in digital translation technologies and corpus-based research provide translators with valuable tools for maintaining consistency in historical terminology. However, they emphasize that human translators remain essential because interpreting historical context and cultural nuance requires critical judgment that current machine translation systems cannot fully replicate. Authentic translations illustrate these theoretical perspectives. In *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, many historical titles such as *ealdorman* and *witan* are retained in English editions with explanatory notes rather than being replaced with modern administrative terms. This foreignizing approach preserves the institutional structure of early medieval England. Similarly, translations of *Magna Carta* generally preserve legal expressions such as *freemen* and *common counsel*, accompanied by annotations that explain their historical significance instead of replacing them with modern legal terminology. Another example can be found in English translations of *The Secret History of the Mongols*, where titles such as *Khan*, *Noyan*, and *Kurultai* are retained because they represent unique political and social institutions of the Mongol Empire. Likewise, translations of *Baburnama* preserve culture-specific terms including *beg*, *amir*, and *divan*, while explanatory notes help readers understand their historical functions.

These examples demonstrate that foreignization effectively maintains historical authenticity, whereas selective domestication improves accessibility for contemporary readers. Overall, previous scholarship suggests that neither foreignization nor domestication alone can adequately address the challenges of translating historical documents. Instead, researchers increasingly advocate a balanced and context-sensitive approach that preserves historical authenticity while ensuring that modern readers can understand the cultural and historical significance of the original text.

Methodology. This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to examine the use of foreignization and domestication in the translation of historical documents. The research focuses on identifying how culture-specific terms, historical titles, administrative concepts, and archaic expressions are translated into English while preserving historical authenticity and ensuring reader comprehension. The research corpus consists of selected excerpts from well-known historical documents, including *Magna Carta*, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, *The Secret History of the*

Mongols, and Baburnama, together with their published English translations. These texts were selected because they represent different historical periods and cultural traditions and contain numerous examples of historically bound terminology. Data were collected through document analysis. Translation units containing historical references, social ranks, legal terminology, and culturally specific expressions were identified and classified according to the strategies of foreignization and domestication. Each example was then compared with its source text to determine the translator's approach and to evaluate its effectiveness in preserving historical meaning. The analysis was guided by the theoretical framework of translation strategies proposed by Lawrence Venuti (1995), supported by insights from Susan Bassnett (2014), Anthony Pym (2014), and Jeremy Munday (2022). Particular attention was given to the relationship between translation strategy, historical authenticity, cultural representation, and target-reader accessibility.

To enhance the reliability of the study, authentic examples from different historical contexts were compared rather than relying on a single document. The findings were interpreted through comparative textual analysis, enabling the identification of recurring translation patterns and the evaluation of their strengths and limitations. This methodological approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how translators balance historical accuracy with readability when translating historical documents.

Analysis and discussion. The analysis of selected historical documents demonstrates that translators rarely rely exclusively on either foreignization or domestication. Instead, they combine both strategies to preserve historical authenticity while ensuring that modern readers can understand the text. The choice of strategy is influenced by the historical significance of the document, the target audience, and the communicative purpose of the translation. One of the most common foreignization techniques is the preservation of historical titles and administrative terms. In *The Secret History of the Mongols*, titles such as Khan, Noyan, and Kurultai are retained in English translations instead of being replaced with modern political equivalents such as king, general, or parliament. Since these institutions have no exact counterparts in English-speaking cultures, retaining the original terms helps preserve the political and cultural identity of the Mongol Empire. Explanatory footnotes further assist readers in understanding these concepts without altering their historical meaning.

A similar approach is found in English translations of *Baburnama*. Terms such as beg, amir, divan, and sipahi are generally preserved because they represent unique administrative and military institutions of Central Asia. Translating amir simply as commander or leader would reduce its historical significance and ignore its political role within the Timurid state. Therefore, foreignization successfully maintains the authenticity of the historical narrative while explanatory notes improve reader

comprehension.

The translation of Magna Carta provides another example of balancing translation strategies. Legal expressions such as freemen, common counsel, and feudal relief are largely preserved in modern English editions because they represent specific medieval legal concepts. Instead of replacing these terms with contemporary legal vocabulary, translators frequently provide annotations explaining their historical context. This approach enables readers to understand the document without sacrificing its legal and historical accuracy.

Foreignization is also evident in translations of The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Terms such as ealdorman, witan, and shire are retained because they describe political institutions unique to Anglo-Saxon England. Rendering witan simply as council would fail to convey its historical function as an advisory assembly of nobles and clergy. Retaining the original terminology allows readers to appreciate the distinctive political structure of early medieval England. Despite these advantages, foreignization alone is not always effective. Historical documents often contain archaic vocabulary and syntactic structures that may confuse contemporary readers. In such cases, domestication improves readability without substantially altering historical content. For example, obsolete grammatical constructions in Magna Carta are commonly modernized in contemporary translations while preserving the original legal terminology. Likewise, long and complex sentence structures in medieval chronicles are frequently divided into shorter sentences to facilitate comprehension. The findings indicate that domestication is particularly useful when translating explanatory passages rather than culture-bound terminology. Linguistic modernization helps readers process historical information more efficiently, whereas excessive adaptation of historical titles, legal concepts, or social ranks may distort the original historical reality. Consequently, translators should distinguish between linguistic accessibility and cultural preservation. Comparative analysis of the selected texts demonstrates that the most successful translations employ a balanced strategy. Culture-specific historical terms are preserved through foreignization, while syntax, punctuation, and less significant lexical items are adapted through domestication. This combination enables translators to maintain historical authenticity while ensuring that target readers can understand the historical narrative without unnecessary difficulty.

Overall, the analysis supports the view that foreignization and domestication should not be regarded as opposing methods but as complementary translation strategies. Their effective integration allows historical documents to retain their cultural identity while remaining accessible to modern audiences, thereby promoting accurate intercultural communication and preserving historical heritage across languages.

Conclusion

The translation of historical documents requires translators to balance linguistic accuracy, cultural preservation, and reader accessibility. This study has demonstrated that the strategies of foreignization and domestication each play an essential role in conveying historical meaning across languages. Foreignization preserves culture-specific terminology, historical institutions, and the linguistic identity of the source text, thereby maintaining the authenticity of historical records. Domestication, on the other hand, enhances readability by adapting linguistic structures and explanatory elements to the expectations of contemporary readers. The analysis of *Magna Carta*, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, *The Secret History of the Mongols*, and *Baburnama* shows that neither strategy alone is sufficient for translating historical documents effectively. Excessive foreignization may make the text difficult to understand, while excessive domestication can obscure important historical and cultural information. Therefore, successful historical translation requires a balanced and context-sensitive approach in which culturally significant terms are preserved and linguistic complexity is carefully adapted when necessary. The findings also highlight the continuing importance of human translators. Although digital translation technologies and machine translation systems can support terminology management and improve consistency, they cannot fully interpret historical context, cultural symbolism, or ideological nuances embedded in historical texts. Human expertise remains indispensable for producing translations that are both historically accurate and culturally meaningful. Future research may expand this field by comparing the translation of historical documents across different language pairs or by investigating the role of artificial intelligence and corpus-based tools in supporting historical translation. Such studies will further contribute to the development of translation strategies that preserve cultural heritage while meeting the communicative needs of modern readers.

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