

Research Article

Facing Untranslatability - The Mainstream Arsenal of Strategies

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Abstract

In the face of linguistic and cultural untranslatability, translation emerges as a strategic act rather than a purely mechanical process. This paper presents a comprehensive inventory of translation strategies, grounded in both theoretical frameworks and practical considerations. It begins by exploring the concept of strategy through various academic lenses, distinguishing it from tactics, and identifying its core elements and domains. The study then shifts focus to translation-specific strategies, examining the requirements for strategic choice and the structural and functional factors that shape it. These include text type, language function, levels of signification, and the cultural and communicative contexts of both the source and target texts. Strategies are categorised into direct, oblique, and global types, encompassing literal translation, calque, modulation, adaptation, and broader approaches such as foreignisation and domestication. Through this layered classification, the paper highlights the need for adaptive, context-sensitive decision-making in the translation process. Ultimately, it argues that facing untranslatability requires more than technical skill-it demands a dynamic, reflective, and strategic engagement with meaning across languages and cultures.

Keywords

Translation Strategy, Language Function, Level of Signification, Cultural Filtering, Direct Translation, Oblique Translation, Text Function

1. Introduction

The act of translation, far from being a simple linguistic transcoding, constitutes a complex process of intercultural communication that requires a continuous stream of strategic decisions. Translation has never been merely a mechanical act of linguistic substitution but a complex decision-making process influenced by multiple strategic considerations. While much attention has been given to the final product of translation, the underlying strategies that guide translators' choices often remain concealed, operating, as it were, backstage.

Therefore, translators are not just bilingual individuals;

they are adept navigators of linguistic and cultural terrains, making decisions at various levels to effectively communicate meaning and meet specific communicative objectives in a new context. The overarching framework that guides these decisions, often referred to as "translation strategy," is the primary focus of this study. Although scholarly discussion has extensively explored specific translation techniques and their uses, gaining a deeper understanding of the core strategic orientations that support these choices remains essential for both theoretical progress and practical use in the field.

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This research aims to go beyond analysing isolated techniques to explore the fundamental principles and contextual factors that influence the adoption and implementation of translation strategies. It also aims to reveal these hidden mechanisms by systematically examining the concept of translation strategy: its definitions, theoretical foundations, and the factors that affect its application.

The concept of strategy itself is complex, originating from military, managerial, and game-theoretical roots before being adapted to linguistics and translation studies. This research begins by defining the term, distinguishing it from related concepts such as tactics, and integrating various academic perspectives to create a comprehensive working definition. It then examines how strategic thinking is applied to translation, where decisions are shaped by both structural factors (such as text type, language function, and linguistic limits) and functional factors (like audience expectations, cultural differences, and the translation's purpose).

A key focus of this investigation is the interaction between different levels of linguistic meaning (denotation, connotation, and mythical signification) and how they require distinct strategic approaches, from direct to oblique and global strategies. By mapping these choices onto a coherent framework, this study aims to clarify the translator's decision-making process, providing a more systematic understanding of how and why certain strategies are used in specific contexts.

Ultimately, this study advances translation theory by connecting abstract strategic principles with their practical application, emphasising that every translation results from deliberate, contextually embedded choices. From this perspective, the "backstage" of translation becomes not just visible but vital to understanding the art and science of cross-linguistic mediation. Additionally, this study offers a systematic overview of key translation strategies, categorising them into direct, oblique, and global approaches. This categorisation provides a practical framework for understanding the diverse strategic options available to translators and how these choices relate to the structural and functional factors previously discussed. Ultimately, this research aims to illuminate the implicit reasoning behind translator decisions, thereby contributing to a deeper theoretical understanding of the strategic aspects of translation and serving as a valuable resource for future research and pedagogical development in the field.

2. Strategy

2.1. Strategy: Definitions & Perspectives

2.1.1. Definition of the Term "Strategy"

Oxford Dictionary defines strategy as "a plan or method for achieving a particular goal, usually over a long period." [1] It is commonly used in business, the military, education, com-

munication, and translation. According to the Longman Dictionary, strategy is "a planned series of actions for achieving something in the future, especially in politics, business, or military affairs." [2] Collins English Dictionary describes strategy as "a particular long-term plan for success, especially in business or politics." [3] Cambridge Dictionary presents strategy as "a detailed plan for achieving success in situations such as war, politics, business, industry, or sport, or the skill of planning for such situations." [4] Meanwhile, Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines strategy as "the science and art of employing the political, economic, psychological, and military forces of a nation or group of nations to afford the maximum support to adopted policies in peace or war." Also: "A careful plan or method for achieving a particular goal." [5].

2.1.2. Academic Perspectives on Strategy

Chandler states that strategy is "the determination of the basic long-term goals and objectives of an enterprise, and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out these goals." [6] As for Mintzberg, strategy is multifaceted. That is the reason why setting a strategy, from his perspective, involves fulfilling the "Five Ps" that he introduces as follows: *Plan* (a guideline to deal with a situation), *Ploy* (a specific manoeuvre intended to outwit a competitor), *Pattern* (a set of planned or unplanned actions over time), *Position* (spotting particular products in specific fields), and *Perspective* (a unique point of view about the world, encompassing the planned actions and the achieved outcomes). [7] On his part, Rumelt relates a good strategy to the presence of three elements: diagnosis (defining the nature of the challenge), Guiding Policy (a comprehensive method selected to deal with the challenge), and Coherent Actions (specific steps that are consistent with the guiding policy and designed to implement it). [8].

2.1.3. A Synthetic Perspective on Strategy

Re-examining all the definitions above, strategy appears to be a comprehensive, well-planned set of actions or guiding principles aimed at achieving long-term goals or an overarching objective in situations involving challenges such as complexity, competition, or uncertainty. It is a high-level plan that provides a framework for decision-making, outlining the approach to follow to attain desired results. It involves making deliberate decisions about resource allocation, prioritising tasks, and coordinating actions to increase the likelihood of success, considering available resources and external factors. The core concept of strategy, therefore, revolves around a deliberately integrated set of choices and actions aimed at achieving desired outcomes in a complex and competitive environment. It entails understanding the context, setting goals, allocating resources, and deciding how to compete and succeed.

In brief, strategy is, firstly, the roadmap that guides someone from their current position to their desired destination or from a present state into a future one. Secondly, it represents

the how behind what an individual or organisation aims to achieve. Thirdly, a good strategy recognises the challenging nature of the constraints ahead and approaches them with an effective way to overcome them. It remains practical and aspirational simultaneously. Fourthly, strategy has a long-term perspective. Fifthly, it is more stable as it establishes fundamental directions. Overall, strategy is the framework of choices that directs a project towards its long-term objectives, helps navigate uncertainty, and maintains a competitive edge. It concerns what the organisation aims to accomplish and the broad strategies it will adopt.

2.1.4. Key Elements of Strategy

The key elements of a strategy include setting clear objectives that define what to achieve, a long-term perspective that extends beyond immediate actions and short-term results (outcomes achieved over a more extended period), a thorough analysis that assesses internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats, rational allocation of resources (time, money, and personnel), a plan of actions with specific steps and tasks (timelines, responsibilities, etc.), a competitive advantage that enables outperforming rivals (having a unique or practical approach that provides an edge over competitors), a decision-making framework ensuring consistent decisions throughout the effort, and flexibility and adaptability to allow adjustments in response to changing conditions and competitors.

2.2. Strategy Versus Tactic

Strategy provides the framework, while tactics offer the means to achieve the outlined strategy. Strategy and tactics are interconnected. While strategy guides tactics, the latter executes the former. A clear strategy gives purpose to tactical actions, whereas an unclear strategy renders them aimless. Effective tactics, in turn, contribute to the overall strategy by bringing the strategic plan to life.

In a military context, Clausewitz distinguishes between strategy and tactics. He considers strategy the use of engagements to achieve the war's objectives, while tactics are the theories behind the deployment of military forces in combat. This emphasises the hierarchical relationship where tactics support strategic aims. [9] In a business context, Chandler emphasises that strategy involves setting long-term goals and allocating resources. In contrast, tactics refer to the specific methods employed in daily operations to achieve those goals. In Mintzberg's "five Ps" framework, the distinction between strategy and tactics is implicit. While "Plan" signifies a consciously devised strategy, "Ploy" refers to a specific tactic used to outwit a competitor. "Pattern," as a realised strategy, develops from a series of tactics over time. Porter contends that a successful strategy involves defining a unique and valuable position through a distinctive set of activities. Tactics are the specific actions undertaken to deliver that unique value proposition. [10] Liddell Hart high-

lights that strategy aims to attain objectives with minimal losses, often via indirect approaches. Tactics refer to the direct engagements and manoeuvres employed in executing a strategy. [11].

To summarise, strategy is the overarching plan. At the same time, tactics refer to the specific tools, actions, or methods employed to implement a strategy and achieve short-term objectives that support the broader strategic goals. They are the how of executing the strategy. Strategy involves long-term goals (what to achieve and why?), whereas tactics focus on short-term ones (how to implement the strategy?). Strategy is conceptual, while tactics are concrete and detailed, addressing all the wh-questions. Strategy generalises, while tactics specify. Strategy is more stable, whereas tactics are more flexible and adaptable. Despite their differences, strategy and tactics are closely interconnected, both essential for success in any targeted field.

2.3. Fields of Strategy

Strategies exist across many fields. They are available in all areas and ready for use in various actions. These can include a business strategy (such as expanding into new markets or launching a new product line), a military strategy (deploying forces to outmanoeuvre an enemy), or a personal strategy (replanning one's financial savings). They also encompass teaching strategies (such as outlining a plan to address reading difficulties among students), political strategies, translation strategies, and more. Nonetheless, all strategies serve the fundamental purpose of providing a coherent plan for action aimed at achieving success.

3. Translation Strategy

3.1. Perspectives

3.1.1. Academic Perspectives on Translation Strategy

According to Chesterman, translation strategies are "potentially conscious plans for solving concrete translation problems in the framework of a concrete translation task." [12] He emphasises that these strategies are process-oriented, goal-oriented, problem-centred, consciously applied, intersubjective (i.e., understandable and justifiable to others), and liable to manipulate the translated texts.

Hurtado Albir distinguishes between method, strategy, and technique. For her, a translation strategy is an individual and procedural mechanism that the translator employs to handle problems encountered during the translation process, adapted to specific needs. It serves as a higher-level plan that directs the selection of particular translation techniques. [13] Although Hurtado Albir and Molina concentrate on translation techniques (specific procedures used to analyse and classify translation solutions), their framework implicitly underscores

the significance of overarching strategies in guiding the choice and application of these techniques. They emphasise the dynamic and functional nature of translation, where strategies are used to achieve the intended communicative effect in the target language. [14].

Lörscher regards translation strategies as "potentially conscious procedures for solving problems faced in translating a text from one language to another." [15] He highlights the cognitive processes involved in translation and the strategies used by translators to overcome difficulties.

Venuti explores key ethical and cultural strategies, focusing on the contrast between domestication (translating so that it reads smoothly and sounds natural in the target culture, often rendering the translator invisible) and foreignisation (keeping the foreign qualities of the source text and culture, making the translator more visible). [16].

3.1.2. A Synthetic Perspective on Strategy

Perspectives on translation vary depending on the cognitive, cultural, linguistic, or ethical factors involved. However, it is possible to define a translation strategy as a systematic approach used by translators to effectively convert a text from one language to another while preserving the intended meaning, expressive tone, accuracy, readability, cultural appropriateness, and nuances. It acts as the framework guiding informed decisions throughout the translation process, resulting in a high-quality, effective translation that meets the target audience's expectations and the project's specific needs. It reflects the thought process behind translation and the careful decision-making that influences the translator's choices at every stage. Moreover, it serves as the translator's roadmap for navigating the complexities of interlingual and intercultural communication, taking into account the purpose of the translation, the target audience, the characteristics of the source text, and the constraints of the target language and culture—all while transferring structure, meaning, and style from the source to the target text.

3.2. Translation Strategy Choice Requirements

Some strategies are completely direct and literal, similar to how translation was in the days of linguistic theory. Other strategies are entirely indirect, as seen in Skopos theory. Still, many strategies are combined, used by skilled translators and employed in flexible approaches. The choice of translation strategy depends on factors like text type, target audience, purpose, cultural context, and linguistic differences between the languages. Skilled translators often blend several techniques in a single project to achieve the best results.

The initial requirement before choosing a translation strategy is understanding the source text and its purpose, including analysing its content, style, tone, and intended audience. The second involves defining the target audience, the translation's purpose, and the desired impact on the target readership. The third step is determining the appropriate level

of equivalence and approach that aligns with the goals of the translation project, depending on how the relationship between the target text and the original is viewed. This could range from a literal translation on the far left (a word-for-word approach typically used in technical documents where accuracy is crucial), to a communicative translation on the far right (focused on impact and naturalness to the target reader), or an adaptation on the extreme right (a free modification to suit the target culture, such as in plays or advertisements), or a semantic translation in between (aiming to convey the meaning and nuances as closely as possible while respecting the grammatical, semantic, and textual conventions of the target language).

The fourth requirement is cultural factors, a crucial aspect to consider as they significantly influence texts and symbolically shift their meanings, creating potential cultural differences (idioms, proverbs, maxims, sayings, etc.) that might not be understood in the same way or may have the same impact in the target culture. Here, decisions must be made on how to handle such situations: whether to translate directly, adapt, or explain these elements. The fifth requirement is resource and constraint management, which involves considering the available time, budget, tools and technologies (such as CAT tools or machine translation), and the expertise of the translators involved. The final requirement is ensuring quality and consistency. The strategy should specify how quality will be maintained throughout the process, including review, proof-reading, and editing stages, as well as how consistency in terminology and style will be preserved.

3.3. Factors Influencing Translation Strategy Choice

There are two types of factors that directly influence the choices of translation strategy. The first is structural, focusing on aspects such as text typology, field of translation, language function, and levels of signification. The second is functional, emphasising the text's polyphony, the target audience's expectations, the cultural context, and the text's function.

3.3.1. Structural Factors

A field of translation strategy refers to a set of specialised approaches and methodical frameworks developed to translate content within specific domains or disciplines. Each field requires particular considerations due to its specialised terminology, conventions, and audience expectations. Furthermore, each field demands specific expertise not only in the involved languages (literary language, scientific language, economic language, etc.) but also in the subject matter itself (prose/poetry/criticism, biology/physics/geology, banking/accounting/commerce, etc.) to ensure maximum accuracy and equivalence.

There are three types of translation: specialised translation, general translation, and literary translation, which is neither general nor specialised. However, the fields of translation

extend beyond these categories. The main fields include literary translation, scientific translation, technical translation, audiovisual translation, legal translation, medical translation, marketing translation, and localisation. Consequently, the choice of translation strategy must consider the specific field in which the translation will be undertaken.

The specific field of translation partly shapes the identity of any translated text. For example, legal translation is common in courts, laws, and legislation; commercial translation in trade transactions; advertising translation in publicity and marketing; financial (or accounting/banking) translation in finance and business; scientific translation in fields such as chemistry, physics, biology, geology, and astronomy, as well as abstract sciences like mathematics; medical translation in medicine and its various branches; technical translation in engineering disciplines; software translation in computer technology; website translation in cybernetics, which mainly differs from software translation when the browser is directly online; journalistic translation in both print and electronic media, covering newspaper editorials, news reports, weather forecasts, and press interviews; military translation related to armament, military intelligence, and soldiers' conditions; religious translation involving sacred texts, prophetic biographies, fatwas, and religious studies; cultural translation in areas such as thought, philosophy, criticism, and humanistic studies; and literary translation in creative fields like drama (including classical, experimental, and one-man shows), poetry (epic, poetic, haiku, rhymed verse, free verse, and prose poetry), and prose (fiction, non-fiction, science fiction, etc.), where figures of speech and rhetorical images flourish.

Language function is another structural factor. It was first introduced by Karl Bühler in 1934, as communication is a triangular relationship among the speaker, the listener, and external reality. He proposed the Organon Model of language, believing that every linguistic sign serves three language functions. The first language function is representational, focusing on context or reference, and conveying information about the external world. [17] The second language function is expressive, focusing on the sender or speaker, and expressing their emotions, intentions, and viewpoints. The third and final language function is appellative, concentrating on the receiver or addressee, and aiming to influence the hearer or appeal to them.

Later, in 1960, Roman Jakobson expanded Bühler's model into a six-function framework based on communication theory and semiotics. The first language function is referential, providing information about the context, reference, or situation. The second language function is emotive or expressive, conveying the sender's feelings or intentions. The third language function is conative or appellative, directly addressing the receiver with imperative verbs and second-person pronouns. The fourth language function is phatic, facilitating the opening and maintenance of communication. The fifth language function is metalingual, clarifying language itself. The sixth language function is poetic, emphasising the message

for its structure, style, rhythm, and wording. [18] All six functions are present in every act of communication; however, only one function usually dominates, depending on the context.

A linguistic function describes the role that a specific linguistic element, such as a word, phrase, or grammatical structure, plays within a sentence or utterance. It highlights how language forms operate both structurally and semantically in communication contexts. Crystal defines linguistic function as "the role played by a linguistic unit (word, phrase, clause) in a sentence or discourse, such as subject, object, modifier, or predicate." [19].

Linguistic function differs from language function. While linguistic function concerns the role of elements in sentence structure (such as subject, object, or modifier), language function deals with the purpose of discourse (such as requesting, apologising, or informing). However, both concepts are essential in determining the appropriate translation strategy for a specific project.

Language metafunction pertains to the purpose that language serves in communication. It is what speakers or writers aim to achieve with their utterances. This idea is central in systemic functional linguistics, especially as developed by Michael Halliday, and it plays a vital role in translation quality assessment. According to Juliane House's 2015 TQA model, language functions can be seen as the uses to which language is applied in communication. They convey different meanings or intentions embedded in text. [20].

In this context, functionalist translation scholars, building on Halliday's framework, identify three metafunctions of language: the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. The first of these is the ideational metafunction. It is "the content function of language, which reflects the speaker's experience of the real world." This metafunction embodies experience, content, facts and data, ideas, and logical relationships. It captures both the external world and inner experience.

The second language metafunction is the interpersonal metafunction. It aims to establish and maintain social relations. It expresses the speaker's attitudes and evaluations. This metafunction represents social interaction and attitude. It conveys the speaker's feelings, judgments, and emotions. It positions the speaker in relation to others, whether they are casual, informal, polite, rude, affectionate, commanding, patronising, or otherwise.

The third and final language metafunction is the textual metafunction. It "relates to the way the message is structured, so that it is cohesive and coherent." This metafunction represents language as a structured message. It organises the text cohesively and coherently, ensuring flow and clarity for the reader or listener, through the use of linking words, subordinators, and conjunctions. While Michael Halliday considers the textual metafunction, the last of the language metafunctions, fundamental in functionalist analysis, Juliane House assigns it little importance in translation quality as-

essment.

House argues: "A translation is functionally equivalent if it preserves the meaning and intention of the original text across all three metafunctions." In her 2015 TQA model, she emphasises the importance of understanding language metafunction for various reasons. Reason One: The translator must preserve the original metafunction in the target language (functional equivalence). Reason Two: A text may prioritise one metafunction over others: interpersonal in poetry, and ideational in scientific writing. Reason Three: Misjudging any language metafunction can lead to a mis-translation, even if the words are rendered correctly.

Another structural factor that influences translation is the level of signification refer to the process by which meaning is created and interpreted through signs, especially in language, media, and semiotics. This concept is essential in semiotics, linguistics, and translation studies. In his *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes outlined two main levels: denotation (the literal, surface-level meaning of a sign) and connotation (the cultural, emotional, or ideological meaning added on top of the denotation). Barthes describes denotation as the "first-order semiological system" because it is objective and dictionary-based, and he labels denotation as the "second-order semiological system" because it is subjective, contextual, and influenced by culture. Barthes even introduces a third level of signification, a broader one in the form of myth or ideology, where the entire first-order sign (signifier + signified) becomes a single signifier within a new system where myth and ideology are naturalised and accepted. [21].

By the time Roland Barthes' work introduced three levels of signification, two language philosophers, Michael Devitt and Kim Sterelny, published in 1999 *Language and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language*, adding a new level of signification, which may be called the zero-level of signification or the multilingual level of signification, since the signifier is itself the signified, as in grammar courses and related issues.

Transitioning from linguistics and the philosophy of language to translation studies, understanding the four levels of signification becomes essential for grasping words and their culturally embedded meanings. This is because a translation that concentrates solely on denotative meaning may risk losing the connotative loads and ideological implications of the source text, as Susan Bassnett writes.[22] Juliane House, on the other hand, devised a cultural filtering approach to refine what may seem untranslatable in the source text, focusing on assessing the cultural context, evaluating pragmatic equivalence, and ensuring that the source text's function and meaning at all levels are maintained in the target text.

Since Ferdinand de Saussure's posthumous lectures on *General Linguistics*, published in 1916, three years after his death, levels of signification have been limited to denotation (where a signifier directly refers to a signified). The field had to wait for Roland Barthes, in his *Mythologies* and *Elements*

of *Semiology*, to add two more levels to denotation, the one discovered by de Saussure in the early twentieth century. With Barthes, connotation (where a signifier refers to a signified indirectly) was introduced as a new level of signification. Barthes distinguished between denotation (the literal, direct, surface meaning of the word), connotation (the cultural, ideological, or associative meanings of the word), and myth (higher-order ideological narratives), a third level of signification.

Yet another fourth level remained undiscovered until 1999, when two scholars, Michael Devitt and Kim Sterelny, in a neighbouring field of language study, philosophy of language, published *Language and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language*, which introduced a fourth level of signification. This level can be referred to as zero-level signification or the metalingual level of signification, as the signifier is itself the signified. However, Devitt and Sterelny chose a different terminology.

The philosophy of language, as explained by Devitt and Sterelny, distinguishes between the linguistic mention of a word or phrase and its linguistic use. Linguistic mention involves referring to the word itself without using it or indicating its meaning, as in: "Al Bayd (البَيْضُ) is a noun derived from Abyad (أَبْيَضُ), Bayad (بَيَاضاً)." The purpose of mentioning Al Bayd here is not to refer to the signified, eggs, but to the signifier itself, since the discussion requires mentioning and naming the items. In contrast, linguistic use involves using the word to refer to the signified and to its application, as in: "Eggs (البَيْضُ) are good for health." Here, the intended meaning of eggs is the signified, because the focus is on their use and relevance as food. [23].

Therefore, four levels of signification must be analysed before selecting the appropriate translation strategy for a given project: the metalingual level (metalinguage), the denotative level (denotation), and the connotative level (connotation). All three levels relate either to linguistic mention or to linguistic use. Simultaneously, they align with the dominant language function in the text or speech. It is based on this clarification that the differences between possible translation strategies can be explained.

Transcription strategy illustrates linguistic reference. To translate the following sentence, "Building (بَنَاءٌ) is a noun derived from the triliteral verb built (بَنَى) such as builds (يَبْنِي)," it is essential, first, to identify the text's field or type. Second, it is necessary to determine the dominant language function, which is a meta-linguistic function constantly referring to itself. Then, it is crucial to establish the level of signification-the zero level-that corresponds to linguistic reference and aligns with translation strategies such as calque or borrowing, often regarded in modern translation studies as part of direct strategies, and viewed as equivalent to transcription strategy, especially when each signifier within the text consistently refers to itself. Nevertheless, transcription strategy remains more specific than calquing and borrowing.

Unlike the transcription strategy, direct and oblique trans-

lation strategies are considered two types of linguistic use. That is why they depend on the intention behind the utterance. If the purpose of the utterance is explicit, direct, and not open to interpretation, the suitable translation strategy is the direct translation strategy. To translate the following sentence, "the public entered the lecture hall and sat in the first places," it is crucial, firstly, to identify the text type as informative, to recognise the dominant linguistic function as referential, and to establish the level of signification as denotative. Therefore, the short text in question will be approached with the direct strategy, which requires that each signifier in the text corresponds to only one signified within the agreed-upon referential context. Consequently, the translation of the short text will proceed as follows:

"Le public entra dans la salle de conférence et s'assit dans les premières rangées." (French translation)

"دخل الجمهور قاعة المحاضرات وجلسوا في المقاعد الأمامية" (Arabic translation)

"Dakhala al-jumhūr Qā'at al-muḥāḍarāt wajalasū fī almaqā'id al-amāmīyah." (Arabic romanised).

If the intention behind the utterance is implicit, indirect, suggestive, and open to interpretation, the suitable translation strategy is the oblique translation strategy. Therefore, reconsidering the earlier short text, "The public entered the lecture hall and sat in the first places," various possibilities can emerge. Multiple outcomes may be expected, depending on changes in the text type, shifts in the dominant language function, and the elevation of the equivalences used from the first level of signification (i.e., denotation) to the second level (i.e., connotation).

"The public entered the lecture hall and sat in the first places."

"The crowd rushed into the auditorium and occupied the front seats."

"People broke into the amphitheatre and invaded the first rows."

"Spectators hustled and bustled into the space and threw themselves onto the VIP seats."

The proposals for translation could be endless and unlimited because the text type is literary, the language function is poetic, and there is no reference to control or restrict the generated texts. Additionally, the level of signification has been elevated to the second level, corresponding to connotation. Given these factors, translating the short text above involves adopting an oblique translation strategy, which requires that each signifier in the text has a first signified in the nearby context outside the text and a second signified in the more distant context, beyond both the ordinary reader and censorship.

"Myth is a form of speech... a system of communication, that is a message," argues Roland Barthes, who categorises levels of signification into two orders: first-order signification, which involves language (signifier + signified = sign), and second-order (mythic) signification, where that sign becomes a new signifier conveying ideological meaning. Here, the

translator is expected to convey not just literal content but also ideological, cultural, and symbolic meanings.

Kwame Anthony Appiah, on his part, proposes "thick translation," which includes contextual and cultural explanations to preserve deep meaning and the mythic connotation in politically or culturally charged texts: "Thick translation is a translation that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context." [24].

Beyond Appiah, Lawrence Venuti advocates for a foreignising translation to make readers aware of the "otherness" of the source culture, resisting the erasure of ideological context and preserving cultural differences: "A foreignising translation... seeks to restrain the ethnocentric violence of translation."

Susan Bassnett believes that "a text is embedded in a network of cultural signs... and translators must negotiate these" [25] while Peter Newmark suggests cultural substitution, where a source-culture reference is replaced by a culturally equivalent one in the target language: "Cultural equivalent: an approximate translation where a cultural reference is replaced by one from the target culture." [26].

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak warns that translation can exoticise and reproduce colonial myths. She advocates for politically conscious translation that questions, rather than merely transfers, cultural myths: "Translation is the most intimate act of reading... a responsibility to the rhetoricity of the original." [27] Translating myth, in brief, is more than just conveying literal meaning. It involves translating cultural codes, ideologies, and implicit connotations. Translation may require finding semiotically equivalent signs, which are not merely linguistic matches but signs that perform similar ideological functions in the target culture.

Translation involves recognising the specific constraints imposed by both the source and target texts, which influence the translator's choices. Concerning the source text, several constraints must be considered. Some are linguistic, such as differences in sentence structure, challenges in translating rhyming and alliteration, or gender and tense systems that may not exist in the target language. Others are cultural, like words that have no direct equivalent, historical or religious references that may require footnotes, or concepts that could be offensive or nonsensical in the target culture. Additionally, some constraints relate to the text type itself; for instance, legal texts demand absolute precision with no room for creative adaptation, while literary texts require the preservation of style and figures of speech, and technical manuals must maintain consistent terminology.

3.3.2. Functional Factors

The effect and influence of the *target audience* on translation are undeniable. The target audience is a vital factor in translation, as it shapes linguistic, cultural, and functional choices. Its influence can determine linguistic adaptation or lexical selection (formal versus colloquial language, simpli-

fied sentences for children or language learners, technical jargon for experts versus layman's terms for general readers), cultural adaptation (localisation versus foreignisation), text structure (simplification versus elaboration), and the specific needs of the target audience (formal versus casual, cultural knowledge). The audience's purpose for reading guides the translation strategy.

The second functional factor is *Cultural gap* refers. It refers to the lack of equivalence between source and target cultures, making it difficult or impossible to translate certain concepts, values, or references directly. This phenomenon occurs when a word, phrase, or idea in one language has no direct equivalent in another because of differences in history, religion, social norms, or material culture. That is why the main features of cultural gaps include untranslatability (terms without exact equivalents), asymmetrical associations (words with different connotations across cultures), institutional differences (legal, political, or religious systems that do not match, such as "common law" versus "sharia law"), and material culture gaps (objects or practices that cannot exist elsewhere, such as types of "dates" or "lion" distinctions in Arabic).

Cultural gaps highlight that translation is not merely linguistic but also an act of intercultural mediation. Successful translation requires awareness of cultural context and strategic choices to balance fidelity and readability. In this context, André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett, in 'Cultural Turn in Translation Studies', argued that translation is not just linguistic but a cultural negotiation. Mona Baker, in '*Taxonomy of Non-Equivalence*', identified cultural gaps as a significant hurdle in achieving equivalence.[28] David Katan, in '*Cultural Mediation*', proposed strategies such as *explicitation*, *adaptation*, or *borrowing* to bridge gaps.[29] Lawrence Venuti, in '*Foreignisation versus Domestication*', observes that cultural gaps force translators to choose between preserving *foreignness* or *adapting*.

Strategies to bridge cultural gaps are diverse: borrowing (to retain the original term, "Couscous"), *calque* (literal translation of "Lingua Franca" from Arabic "Language of the Frank"), *explicitation* (adding explanations like "Al Moussem, religious festival in Morocco"), *cultural substitution* (replacing with a target-culture equivalent such as "football" in British English instead of "soccer"), *omission* (dropping untranslatable elements), or compensation.

Nevertheless, numerous imminent challenges could hinder the translation process. The first is over-adaptation, where domestication might erase cultural identity. The second is exoticism, where foreignisation could unintentionally reinforce exotic stereotypes and overly exoticise the source culture. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that foreignisation, although intended to respect the integrity of the source text, can backfire when used uncritically (especially with texts from marginalised cultures). Instead of fostering understanding, it can reinforce "otherness" and exotic stereotypes, turning the source culture into a curiosity or spectacle for Western audiences, and reproducing colonial patterns of

consumption where cultural difference is aestheticised rather than truly understood. The third challenge is the loss of nuance: no strategy fully captures the original's depth. [30].

In Juliane House's 1977 translation quality assessment model, a cultural filter is a concept used to explain how a source text is adapted to align with the norms and expectations of the target culture. It involves modifying linguistic and cultural elements to make the translation more acceptable or familiar to the target audience, potentially altering the original's cultural specificity. She introduces the cultural filter as "a means of capturing socio-cultural differences in expectation norms and stylistic conventions between source and target linguacultures".

Cultural filtering is expected to enable translators to 'adapt the source text to target cultural norms', sometimes leading to shifts that may influence the original's function. The concept was introduced into translation studies by House to address socio-cultural differences between source and target language communities, particularly in the context of covert translation. She describes a cultural filter as a tool for capturing differences in shared conventions of behaviour, communication, preferred rhetorical styles, and expectation norms between two speech communities. The aim is to achieve functional equivalence in the target text by carefully examining cultural differences before making any alterations to the source text's meaning structure.

House recognises that excessive cultural filtering can lead to domestication and the loss of the source text's foreignness. However, she firmly believes that some degree of filtering is necessary to achieve functional equivalence in covert translation. This translation approach aims to function as an original text within the target culture, requiring adjustments to meet the target audience's expectations and norms.

Translation serves as a bridge between languages and cultures, enabling communication, knowledge sharing, and mutual understanding. Its primary aims include facilitating communication among people speaking different languages, preserving and passing down cultural values, literature, and traditions, making scientific, technical, legal, and educational content accessible worldwide, supporting international business, diplomacy, and globalisation, and adapting films, books, and games for wider audiences.

From this perspective, translation is a purposeful, context-dependent activity that facilitates cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication while fulfilling specific social, cultural, and textual functions. It is a goal-oriented communicative act [31] that mediates meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries while fulfilling particular social, cultural, and textual roles. Unlike earlier linguistic approaches that prioritised equivalence, [32] contemporary theories emphasise that translation is shaped by its intended purpose (skopos), audience expectations, and sociocultural constraints. [33].

The purpose of translation goes beyond simple linguistic transfer, including adaptation, mediation, and even transformation of content tailored to the target audience and situa-

tional needs. It influences textual modifications (omissions, expansions, and cultural adaptations), linguistic registers (formal, colloquial, and dialectal choices), and medium-specific strategies such as subtitling versus dubbing in audiovisual translation. Therefore, translation is not a neutral act but a functional, audience-centred process. Its goal determines whether it prioritises fidelity, readability, persuasion, or cultural adaptation.

Primary purposes may vary across different theories. In Skopos theory, the purpose (skopos) of a translation determines its form and approach. According to Eugene Nida, translation aims to ensure that the target text effectively conveys the source text's message, prioritising dynamic equivalence over formal correspondence. Susan Bassnett believes that the purpose of translation is to rewrite the source text so that the original cultural elements conform to target-culture norms. Lefevre considers the purpose of translation as reshaping perceptions through specific choices, such as censorship and localisation. Cronin, in his view, sees the purpose of translation as facilitating international trade, the localisation of products, and improving accessibility in multilingual markets.

In conclusion, the purpose of translation greatly influences the translation strategies used. Depending on the intended function, a translation can be either source-oriented (literal), target-oriented (adaptive), or instrumental (functional equivalence). Source-oriented translation prioritises accuracy for legal, technical, or scholarly texts. [34] Target-oriented translation modifies content for cultural relevance, as seen in marketing or literature. Instrumental translation ensures that the translation functions in the same way as the original, similar to user manuals.

It is quite common to confuse language functions with text functions, even in scholarly translation studies. Katarina Reiss (1971), along with Hans Vermeer (1984) and other German functionalists, fell into that trap completely, working on text types and language functions as if they were the same. Simplifying the functions of texts based on the dominant language function in a given text can never help to identify the specific text function. Therefore, it cannot create true functional equivalence between the source and target texts.

From the distribution of language functions analysed earlier, based on the dominance of certain factors over others, it is clear that language function remains constant and is independent of context. It is unaffected by cultural or situational contexts, as it belongs to the realm of structure rather than function. This highlights the key difference between language function, a structural concept used within a structuralist framework, and text function, a functional concept employed within a functionalist perspective. [35]

3.4. Key Translation Strategies

There are three categories of translations to which all active strategies belong. The first category is direct or literal. The

second is oblique or adaptive. The third is global, and it involves text-level decisions. In the long term, all of them use procedures to achieve their goals.

3.4.1. Direct Translation Strategies

Direct translation strategies involve closely following the source text's structure, syntax, and lexical choices, prioritising word-for-word accuracy over stylistic adaptation. They are also used when the source and target languages share sufficient linguistic and cultural similarities to allow for minimal deviation, thereby establishing strong linguistic and cultural ties. This strategy is quite common when translating languages that share many features, such as Romance languages (Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian, and Romanian), Germanic languages (German, Dutch, Flemish, Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, and English), or Semitic languages (Arabic, Amharic, Tigrinya, Aramaic, Hebrew, Maltese).

The main features of direct translation are word-for-word correspondence (or formal equivalence), where possible. The aim is to preserve the original grammatical structures and require minimal cultural adaptation (as opposed to communicative translation) in contexts demanding precision, such as legal documents, scientific texts, or religious scriptures. Direct translation is useful for precision-focused texts but can lead to awkwardness when languages differ structurally. Translators must decide whether to prioritise form (direct communication) or fluency (adaptive methods) depending on the context. It is a strategy that closely reflects the source text in form and structure. While it can be effective, especially in highly formal or technical contexts, it may cause unnatural or incorrect translations in idiomatic or culturally nuanced texts. Its application requires careful consideration of both linguistic and cultural compatibility between languages.

The terms "*direct*" and "*oblique*" translation were first introduced by Vinay & Darbelnet in their collaborative work, *Comparative Stylistics of French and English*, published in 1958. [36] Eugene Nida, in 1964, used *formal* equivalence (similar to direct translation) and *dynamic* equivalence (similar to oblique translation). In 1988, Peter Newmark published *A Textbook of Translation*, where he distinguishes semantic translation (close to direct translation) from communicative translation (close to oblique translation). Lawrence Venuti relates direct translation techniques to his idea of "foreignization": "Foreignising translation signifies the difference of the foreign text by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language."

Vinay and Darbelnet distinguish between three types of direct translation strategies: literal translation, calque, and borrowing. The first type, literal translation (also known as word-for-word translation or formal equivalence), is regarded as the primary translation technique used in the direct translation strategy. It is a one-dimensional translation that focuses on the straightforward meaning of the surface reading without delving more profound into comprehension or analysis. It aims to retain the original structure and ensure grammatical

correctness in the target language. It is especially common in legal and technical texts: "Direct translation occurs when structural and conceptual elements of the source language can be transposed into the target language without breaking the rules of the latter." Newmark confirms this principle but puts it differently: "Literal translation is correct and must not be avoided if it secures referential and pragmatic equivalence to the original."

Calque is another technique within the direct translation strategy. It is also known as a loan translation. Vinay and Darbelnet define it as follows: "Calque is a special kind of borrowing whereby a language borrows an expression from another, but then translates literally each of its elements." Therefore, a calque is a word or phrase that is translated literally from the source language into the target language, maintaining the structure and meaning while using words from the target language. A calque can be lexical, focusing on the literal translation of a phrase (e.g., *skyscraper* in English and *gratte-ciel* in French), or structural, mirroring the grammatical structure.

In translation studies, borrowing and calquing are methods of direct translation as defined by Vinay and Darbelnet. However, they differ significantly in how they transfer elements from the source language into the target language. While borrowing retains the original foreign term in the target language, calque translates it gradually into the target language. Both methods help maintain fidelity to the source text but differ in the degree to which they adapt to the linguistic norms of the target culture.

Borrowing is the process of taking a word or expression directly from the source language without translation and using it in the target language, sometimes with minor phonetic or orthographic changes. Vinay and Darbelnet define borrowing as follows: "Borrowing is the simplest type of translation because it involves no real translation. It is used when the target language lacks an equivalent or for stylistic or cultural reasons." The main objective of borrowing is to fill a lexical gap in the target language, preserve cultural specificity, and maintain authenticity or prestige. An example of borrowing can be the French usage of English words such as: *internet, football, ferryboat, email, ebook...*

3.4.2. Oblique Translation Strategies

Oblique translation strategies are used when direct translation fails due to linguistic or cultural differences. The most common ones include modulation, transposition, equivalence, and adaptation.

Modulation specialises in shifting perspectives (mode, form, voice, etc.) to make them sound fluent, spontaneous, and natural. Some cultures favour affirmative phrasing, as seen in the Spanish context, and some writers, such as Ernest Hemingway, avoid using negative forms, words, or expressions. That is, instead of translating "I can't eat any more cake", the modulation will go as follows: "I'm full". In other words, both modulation and transposition work on the lin-

guistic levels of the source text involved. However, while modulation concentrates on the grammatical structure being targeted, it also addresses the semantic meaning to communicate effectively with target readers or listeners.

Transposition (or structural adjustment) is another translation technique used in direct strategies to change word order or grammatical structure in order to adapt syntax when the original form in the source text is not feasible or common in the target language. For example, translating "She appreciates talking to you" (using a gerund instead of an infinitive) from English into French would result in "Elle apprécie parler avec toi" (using an infinitive instead of a gerund), because the literal translation "Elle apprécie la parole avec toi" is not current in French.

Equivalence (also called idiomatic substitution or dynamic equivalence), as opposed to formal equivalence, employs culturally different yet equivalent expressions or idioms. It focuses on the message's effect on the reader rather than achieving precise structure and exact wording. Functional equivalence can be either an adaptation or a free translation.

Adaptation can be either creative or cultural. Cultural adaptation tailors cultural references, idioms, proverbs, maxims, sayings, or concepts to make them more relevant and understandable to the target audience. It involves modifying cultural references because direct translation may sound odd or unappealing. It preserves the idea but adjusts the meaning for the target readers. For example, a local holiday like 'Easter' can be presented as 'ʿĪd al-fiṣḥi' to the Arabic audience. Similarly, a proverb may be replaced with an equivalent in another language, such as shifting "save the white penny for the black day" into French as "Il faut garder une poire pour la soif" or into Arabic as "Iḥfẓ al-Qirsh al-Abyaḍ lil-yawm al-aswad" (احفظ القرش الأبيض لليوم الأسود). Creative adaptation, however, does not focus on culture but on emotions. Instead, it evokes similar feelings to those in the original texts. This approach is commonly used in commercial advertising, children's literature, and pop culture.

3.4.3. Global Translation Strategies

Global translation strategies refer to broad approaches or methods that translators use to manage an entire text, ensuring consistency, accuracy, and cultural appropriateness. These strategies guide the *adaptation* of a text from the source language to the target language while preserving its intended meaning, style, and function. Global translation strategies are distinct from local translation strategies. The former shapes the overall translation approach, affecting tone, style, and cultural relevance, whereas the latter focuses on individual words or phrases.

Lawrence Venuti's concepts of Foreignisation and Domestication are central strategies in global translation. Foreignisation aims to maintain the foreign character of the original text, often through calques or borrowed terms, preserving some source language flavour and keeping original words for cultural authenticity (for example: "assalamu

alaikum"). It is especially used in literary works where cultural flavour is important. (Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim) = "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful." - this preserves theological precision; footnotes explain divine attributes. Domestication, however, involves adapting the text to make it sound natural and familiar to the target culture. This approach prioritises fluency and ease of understanding, ensuring the text feels natural in the target language. For instance, translating Arabic sacred texts: (Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim) = "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful." often replaces Allah with God to suit non-Muslim contexts.

In parallel, Peter Newmark distinguishes between *communicative* translation and *semantic* translation. The former naturally focuses on the purpose of the text and the needs of the target audience. Its main aim is to ensure that the message is delivered effectively and naturally in the target language and culture, even if this involves deviating from the source text's form or literal meaning. According to Newmark, "Communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original." This is often contrasted with semantic translation, which Newmark describes as aiming "to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original." Semantic translation is a method that emphasises conveying the precise contextual meaning of the source text as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the target language permit.

Semantic translation primarily focuses on the author and the source text. Its main goal is to accurately communicate the original's cognitive meaning, including its stylistic and cultural features, while exerting minimal influence from the target language and culture. According to Newmark, "Semantic translation attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original." This differs from communicative translation, which aims to produce an effect on the target reader similar to that experienced by the original readers.

Juliane House's translation strategy is also regarded as a global approach, incorporating both overt and covert strategies. The distinction between overt and covert translation was introduced in 1977 by Juliane House to explain how translations position themselves in relation to the source text and the target culture. While an overt translation strategy maintains the source text's foreignness and cultural context, openly declaring itself a derivative of the source, preserving its original purpose and audience, a covert translation strategy modifies the text to blend smoothly into the target culture, behaving like an original target-language text, often altering cultural references.

4. Conclusion

This study tackles the ongoing issue of untranslatability by

creating a detailed list of translation strategies intended to guide translators through the complex landscape of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural transfer. By synthesising various theoretical perspectives on strategy and applying them to the translation context, it develops a refined framework for understanding the strategic aspects of translation decision-making. The distinction between strategy and tactic, and the placement of translation strategy within broader strategic fields, emphasise the translator's role as an intentional, context-aware endeavour rather than a mechanical task.

Central to this investigation is the understanding that translation strategy is not a fixed or uniform concept, but a dynamic and adaptable response to different structural and functional factors. These include the nature of the source and target texts, the type and purpose of language, and the relationship between linguistic use and mention. By emphasising the denotative, connotative, and mythical levels of meaning, the study shows how translators must navigate untranslatability through direct, oblique, or holistic strategies.

The inventory listed here-comprising literal translation, calque, borrowing, modulation, transposition, equivalence, adaptation, compensation, and broader concepts like foreignisation and domestication-acts as a structured guide for tackling translational challenges. This categorisation shows that strategic choices are influenced not only by textual features but also by wider communicative goals, audience expectations, cultural differences, and the purpose of the translation.

In the face of untranslatability, the translator must go beyond linguistic accuracy towards informed, strategic problem-solving. This research contributes to translation theory by providing a clearer and more systematic understanding of how strategic choices are made, while also emphasising the complex link between theory and practice. The proposed framework has considerable pedagogical value, fostering critical reflection in translator training and supporting a more intentional, culturally responsive translation approach.

Ultimately, by viewing untranslatability as both a challenge and an opportunity, this study redefines translation as a purposeful and adaptable act. The list of strategies offered here not only deepens theoretical understanding but also provides translators with practical tools to achieve functional equivalence and promote effective intercultural communication. It establishes a foundation for future research into the strategic management of untranslatability across different textual and cultural contexts.

Abbreviations

TQA Translation Quality Assessment

Author Contributions

Mohamed Sa'ïd Ra'fani is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Appendix

Mohamed Sa'ïd Raḥani (in Arabic: مُحَمَّد سَعِيد الرَّيْحَانِي), born on December 23, 1968, is a member of the Moroccan Writers' Union. He is holder of PhD. in Translation from King Fahd School of Translation (Tangier/Morocco) in 2023, M. A. in Creative Writing (English Literature) from Lancaster University (United Kingdom) in 2017, M. A. in Translation, Communication & Journalism from King Fahd Advanced School of Translation (Tangier/Morocco) in 2015 and B. A. in English Literature from Abdelmalek Essa'âdi University (T'âouan/Morocco) in 1991.

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Magically Yours! (Short Stories), 2023.

Translation Quality Assessment of the Arabic Versions of English Literature, 2025.

Translatable, Untranslatable, 2025.

Back to Innocence (Short Stories), in preparation.

The Three Keys (An Anthology of Moroccan New Short Story), in preparation.

Short Story Collections in Arabic

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Season of Migration to Anywhere (Short Stories), 2006.

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