

دراسة الترجمة الأدبية من العربية إلى الإنجليزية  
التحديات والحلول المحتملة / تحليل نماذج مختارة من  
رواية فرانكستين في بغداد

Examining Arabic into English Literary  
Translation: Challenges and Potential  
Resolutions – Analyzing examples from  
Frankistine in Baghdad

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**Abstract**

Translating literary texts involves the transfer of an entire culture into a different cultural context. This task seeks to examine the essential attributes and challenges which come across in the interpretation of literary texts. The paper follows some translation techniques and approaches proposed by notable theorists, including Peter Newmark, Eugene Nida, Mona Baker,

and Schleiermacher. Translation theories and methods are introduced to justify the solutions which have been made. These methods are applied here to present optimal solutions for effectively translating literary works, creating a target text that is acceptable and faithful to the original. The paper has based its discussion on the translation of Frankistine in Baghdad\ في فرانكستين في بغداد into English, written by Ahmed

Saadawi and translated into English by Jonathan Wright. The paper studies, analyzes, and solves these problems for this translation. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the results.

#### Key words:

Translation, translating literature, translating strategies.

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#### مستخلص:

تتضمن ترجمة النصوص الأدبية نقل ثقافة بأكملها إلى سياق ثقافي مختلف. تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى فحص السمات والتحديات الأساسية التي تعترض ترجمة النصوص الأدبية. تحاول هذه الدراسة اتباع بعض تقنيات وأساليب الترجمة التي اقترحها منظرون بارزون، بما في ذلك بيتر نيومارك، ويوجين نيدا، ومنى بيكر، وشلايرماخر. يقدم البحث شرحاً لنظريات وأساليب الترجمة لتبرير الحلول وكيف تم تطبيق هذه الأساليب في تقديم الحلول المثلث لترجمة الأعمال الأدبية بشكل فعال، وإنشاء نص مستهدف مقبول ومخلص للنص الأصلي. وارتكزت الدراسة على ترجمة رواية «الفرانكستين في بغداد» إلى اللغة الإنجليزية، بقلم أحمد السعداوي، وترجمها إلى الإنجليزية جوناثان رايت. تحاول الدراسة تحليل وإيجاد المشاكل في هذه الترجمة وأخيراً، الخاتمة تلخص النتائج.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الترجمة، الترجمة الأدبية، استراتيجيات الترجمة

## 1. Introduction

The translation is not - and cannot be - an easy task as it deals with the meaning of "two languages and involves far more than that. As Levý puts it, the translation is not a monistic composition but an interpenetration and conglomerate of two structures." Bassnett, 2002: 16). One perspective involves the inherent meaning and structural contrast of the original work. At the same time, the other viewpoint considers how the complete set of artistic elements is intertwined with the language used in the translation (cited in Susan Bassnett's work from 2002:15).

This paper employs a descriptive and analytical approach, delineating, evaluating, and addressing the intertextual significance within the text, along with the strategies used in translating into English in a literary context. Consequently, the ensuing discourse addresses the following questions: What are the potential challenges in translating Arabic literary content into English? Furthermore, how can these difficulties be subjected to analysis and subsequent resolution?

### 1.1 Aim and Objectives

This paper looks into the theories and strategies for translating literature from Arabic to English, subsequently exposed to analysis. The study delves



into the nuances and discussions within translation studies, proposing diverse methodologies and approaches. Subsequently, it outlines the obstacles faced while translating the literary work, presenting potential remedies for these predicaments. It also aims to enhance understanding of both Arabic and English in the context of literary translation.

### 1.2 Outline of the Frankenstein in Baghdad

The novel “Frankenstein in Baghdad” penned by Ahmed Saadawi, stands as a significant milestone during a prominent phase in Iraqi literary history and the societal backdrop of the nation. Among numerous Arab fictional works vying in the Booker Prize competition, this creation shone brightest, ultimately clinching a well-deserved victory for Ahmed Saadawi. The narrative’s potency arises from its capacity to employ an “other” culture as a symbol and shape a being from the threads of imaginative reality. This accomplishment ignited our admiration for the author’s distinct interpretation of Iraq’s complex circumstances during that period, marked by turbulent political, social, and security dynamics. The author adeptly interwove myriad marvels into the storyline, illuminating prevailing themes and phenomena

through the diverse and creatively inclined Iraqi individuals who enrich the country’s cultural tapestry. This perceptive exploration served as a purposeful endeavor to unravel the effectiveness of integrating the element of the miraculous in addressing this thematic terrain.

The central emphasis of the novel revolves around the character “Al-Shisma,” and it was intricately crafted as the pivotal element around which the entire storyline revolves.

### 2-Literature Review

Translating becomes a challenge due to its unique aesthetic and communicative qualities. The aesthetic dimension highlights the elegance of the wording, symbolic expressions, allegorical elements, metaphors, and more. The communicative qualities convey the author’s concepts and feelings. The translator’s utmost attempt should be to carry these qualities in the target language.

Translation involves bridging cultural gaps. A good translation maintains the intended meaning of the original through its robust structures, influential expressions, linguistic expertise, and the attributes of creativity and understanding. Achieving complete equivalence on all levels is a considerable challenge.

The process of translation involves progressing through a series of steps. There is an analysis of the source text (SLT) and the discernment of the translation's intent. This phase of understanding is succeeded by "problem-solving," where the ST meaning is reconstructed in the target language translation (TTL) (1997:19). In essence, translation becomes a sequence of deciphering, transforming, and then reassembling (Nord, 2005:35).

The translator assumes the roles of a "cultural intermediary" and a "judgment maker" as well. They function as a skilled communicator who considers the interests of both the author and the readers of the target text. Hence, the translator needs to employ their abilities to grasp the intent of the source text's author, ensuring the creation of a suitable text for the target readers. Consequently, the translator must embody the roles of the source text's recipient and reader while also functioning as the producer of the target text. ([https://studopedia.ru/15\\_66354\\_P-1-a-n.html](https://studopedia.ru/15_66354_P-1-a-n.html))

According to Hatim and Masson, translation must function as a communicative process embedded within a societal context. In their publication "Discourse and the Translation" (1989: 1-20), Basil Hatim and Ian Mason shed light on significant

concerns regarding the interplay amid translation and the purpose of language in communication and communal existence. This interconnection mandates that the initial translation task should not be detached from the broader societal context but executed within it. They further emphasize, "Social and institutional divisions, along with functional distinctions: all of these are undeniable" (1989 Hatim & Mason).

This methodical investigation would play a crucial role in translating metaphors. In this situation, the translator's objective is not to directly equate the exact words of the source text (ST) with those of the target text (TT). Instead, the focus is on encapsulating the overall impact that the author intends to evoke within a specific context.

### 2.1 Literal versus Free Translation

Translation studies have witnessed intense debates surrounding the contradiction of literal versus free translation. Certain theorists delineate literal translation as a direct word-for-word rendition (Hatim and Mason, 1989:5). Yet, this form of translation is deemed inaccurate for three fundamental reasons: The idea that each word in one language can be directly matched with an equivalent in another language is not sustainable. Each



language possesses distinct sentence structures, and the complete meaning of a sentence or text cannot be deduced solely from the individual meanings of its lexical elements (Hatim and Mason, 1989).

Other theorists advocate for literal translation, asserting that it is "... accurate and should not be avoided if it maintains referential and pragmatic equivalence to the original" (Newmark, 1988: 86-96). They are careful to distinguish between literal translation and word-for-word translation.

## 2.2 Formal and Dynamic Equivalences

Eugene Nida (1964) discerns between two translation approaches: formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence. On the one hand, formal equivalence closely brings to mind word-for-word translation, directing for "the most accurate match of both form and content" between the source text (ST) and target text (TT) (1989:7). While dynamic equivalence aligns with sense-for-sense translation, where the translator strives to reproduce the same impactful effect on the target readers (TT) as experienced by the source readers (ST). For example, there are instances where formal equivalence is more fitting than dynamic equivalence.

## 2.3 Form versus Content

To a certain extent, both the

structural aspects and the essence of a particular language must be taken into account when translating, as "meaning and form... are not distinct, unrelated elements. A text is an integrated entity, to be translated as a unified whole" (1989:9). Nevertheless, achieving this comprehensive transformation to its fullest extent becomes challenging due to the divergence between the structure of the source language and the conventions of the target language. Consequently, in certain instances, adhering rigidly to the form could potentially obscure the intended meaning or message of the source text.

## 2.4 Transliteration System

Transliteration endeavors to uphold the pronunciation of names, terms, and so forth from the source text (ST) in diverse languages; during transliteration, the characters of one language (SL) are methodically rendered into another language (TL), ensuring a correspondence in pronunciation between the distinct characters or letters of the two languages.

## 2.5 'Foreignizing' and 'Domesticating'

In literary translation, dealing with cultural elements involves translating unique aspects like customs or religious practices from the (ST) to the (TT). Translators use different strategies for

this task. Schleiermacher suggests that translators can either minimize changes to the author's work and guide the reader towards it or minimize changes to the reader's experience and make the author's work more accessible (quoted in Bery, 2007:11).

Ashok Bery, in "Cultural Translation and Postcolonial Poetry" (2007), highlights two key translation strategies for handling linguistic and cultural complexities in the source text (ST). These strategies are known as 'foreignizing' and 'domesticating.' Schleiermacher's concept summarizes the difference between these approaches: either preserving the author's work and guiding the reader or adjusting the author's work to make it more familiar (Bery, 2007:11).

Domesticating strategies involve incorporating the translated work into the target language's idiomatic expressions and cultural nuances. This aligns with a 'sense-for-sense' approach aiming for a translation that functions independently within the native cultural context (Venuti, 2007:11).

On the other hand, foreignizing strategies aim to preserve the source culture's uniqueness. This method highlights the differences between the reader's and foreign cultures portrayed in the source text. The word-for-word approach, retaining aspects of the source

culture's unfamiliarity, corresponds with this strategy. Some scholars, like Lawrence Venuti, see "foreignizing approaches as ethically appropriate, better suited for emphasizing distinctions, especially in situations with power imbalances" (2007:12-3). Both 'domesticating' and 'foreignizing' methods are valid in translation, but the translator must decide when to use each, recognizing that most translations blend elements of both strategies (11-4).

### 3. Example Analysis

- In examples (1, 2), we can see a 'domesticating' in the translation: In the above texts, the intended meaning of شرقي would be "eastern" or "middle eastern." By 'domesticating' the text to the TT, the translator gives the TT readers a more exotic sound.

#### Ex: 1 and 2:

#### مثال 1

"مسحة من جمال شرقي" (ص52)

"A touch of oriental beauty" (p41)

#### مثال 2

"لا تكن شرقي جداً؟"

-وما هو الشرقي؟" (ص55)

"Don't be too oriental?"

"And what does 'too oriental mean?" (p45)



In **examples (3, 4)** of collocations that the translator has found while translating the ST:

### مثال 3

”بيده الثابتة والقوية، حتى يزهد روحه“  
(ص142)

“Hadi gave up the ghost” (p123)

### مثال 4

”ويدخل في غيبوبة بسبب النزيف قبل ان  
تفيض روحه“ (ص236)

“He went into a coma before he gave  
up the ghost”(p195)

In examples (3,4), the translator has not done his best to find suitable and appropriate collocations in the TT that render the intended meaning of the ST in the TT. These examples show the extreme difference between the ST and TT lexical units. In both examples, the translator opted for literal translation and did not find a close equivalent in the TT.

“Ghost” and “الروح” (“al-rouh”) both refer to spiritual entities, but they come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The term “ghost” is primarily used in English-speaking cultures to refer to the

spirit or soul of a deceased person that is believed to linger on Earth. Ghosts are often depicted as supernatural beings that can interact with the living, and they are a common theme in folklore, literature, and popular culture. The concept of ghosts varies across cultures, but they are generally associated with the afterlife and the idea that a person’s spirit remains after death.

In Arabic, “الروح” (“al-rouh”) translates to “the spirit” or “the soul.” This term is used in Islamic culture and theology to refer to a person’s immaterial and spiritual aspects. In Islamic belief, the soul is created by God and is temporarily placed within the body during a person’s earthly life. Upon death, the soul departs from the body and faces judgment based on its actions. The concept of the soul (“الروح”) in Islamic theology encompasses both the human soul and the concept of the Divine Spirit.

While both terms involve the idea of spiritual entities, they are rooted in different cultural and religious contexts and may carry varying meanings and connotations.

Therefore, it is essential to find collocations in the TT that render the exact meaning of the ST.

**Example 5:** below, we see that translating idiomatic expressions and

fixed phrases presents a challenge for any translator.

In the following examples, the translator employs an idiom of similar significance and form that conveys an identical notion and exhibits fitting equivalence in lexical elements. The translator uses an idiom of similar meaning and form:

#### مثال 5

”يا جرائم...هسهه محد يكدر يفتح حلكه وياه.. هذا مصيبة ونزلت من السمه“ (ص193)

“Crimes? No one can say anything about him now. It is a travesty, and it came out of the blue” (p168)

The idiom “Out of the blue” is an idiom. It describes something unexpected or surprising that happens suddenly without any prior warning or indication. This phrase suggests that the event or situation was completely unforeseen as if it came from a clear sky with no clouds, hence the metaphor of “blue” representing a clear sky.

The translation of the ST conveys the same meaning and has appropriate equivalence in the lexical units. Unlike collocations, which might display some adaptability. This is due to their position at “the furthest end of the spectrum from collocations in terms of flexibility in arrangement and clarity in meaning.”

Mona Baker outlines in her book five constraints that a translator must adhere to while translating an idiom: preserving the word order, refraining from omitting or adding words, refraining from substituting words, and retaining the grammatical structure.

#### Example 6:

Below is a case of fixed expressions and idioms encountered while translating. The following examples show an idiom or proverb of similar meaning but dissimilar form,

#### مثال 6

”مكروود“ (ص23)

“old misery”(p23)

According to Baker, fixed phrases and proverbs operate similarly to idioms. Nonetheless, they possess “relatively clear meanings... Yet, even with its clarity... the expression needs to be treated as a cohesive unit for meaning to emerge” (1992:64). Hence, the translator can employ analogous tactics in translating proverbs as those used for translating idiomatic phrases - the subsequent examples serve to underscore this notion.

The term “مكروود (Magrood) is an Iraqi expression that refers to a person who is unlucky and misfortunate all the time. “Old Misery” gives a close idea

of the intended meaning but consists of different lexical units.

**Example (7):**

مثال 7

”لا تكن ذبيلاً له“ (ص115)

”Don’t be his lapdog” (p98)

The expression لا تكن ذبيلاً له and its translation of the ST conveys the same idea called it, or ‘cultural transplantation’ as James Dickens *et al.* (2002:32) describe it. In the ST, the translation “lapdog” is a figure of speech. It is often used as a metaphor to describe someone who is unquestioningly obedient, subservient, or excessively eager to please another person, often to the point of sacrificing their independence or integrity. The term “lapdog” refers to a small dog that is kept as a pet and often sits on its owner’s lap, symbolizing the close and submissive nature of the relationship.

When someone is referred to as a “lapdog,” it implies that they are unthinkingly following someone else’s orders or opinions without questioning or thinking critically. This figure of speech highlights the described person’s lack of assertiveness or independent thought.

**Example 8:**

مثال 8

”هذا صاحبك الكلاوجي عايفك هنا ورايح

يلعب بذيلة مو؟“ (ص268)

“So that joker friend of yours has you tied up here’(217)

The expression كلاوجي is used in Iraqi slang to describe a person who is an individual could be referred to as a “fraudster” or a “swindler.” These terms describe someone who engages in dishonest activities to deceive and take advantage of others.

The phrase “your joker friend” is not a metaphor. It is a simple description or label that refers to someone considered humorous, playful, or known for making jokes and being lighthearted. It is a direct way of characterizing the person’s personality without using figurative language. In Western culture, “joker” typically refers to a person known for their humor, jokes, and often playful or witty behavior. A joker is someone who enjoys making others laugh and lightening the mood. The term can also describe a prankster, often playing practical jokes on others.

In some contexts, “joker” might also describe someone who behaves foolishly or eccentrically, often to draw attention to themselves or be unconventional; this can sometimes have a slightly negative connotation, suggesting the

person might not be taken seriously in certain situations.

### **Example 9 and 10:**

#### **مثال 9**

”لقمة الصمون المدافة بقيمر العرب“ (ص256)  
 “Bread with clotted cream” (p208)

#### **مثال 10**

”يفطرون كيمر عرب مع كاهي“  
 “Thick cream”(p77)

In both examples *قيمر عرب* is an Iraqi food which is usually eaten at breakfast. Sometimes, the nature of the ST makes it hard to avoid exoticism in the TT. Accordingly, adopting a communicative translation of these food terms, the novel sheds light on many characters of Iraqi society, and the author used deliberately to convey the Iraqi society. Thus, adopting exoticism is essential in such a context.

### **Examples 11,12:**

Below is another example of adopting exoticism:

#### **مثال 11**

”هناك في وادي السلام في النجف“ (ص46)  
 (Ex.11) “There, in the valley of Peace in Najaf” (p36)

In the example above, the translator

opted for literal translation. “Wady al-Salam” is the world’s biggest Islamic cemetery in Iraq’s holy and sacred city of Al Najaf. The literal translation gives the TT readers an exotic feeling of the text.

#### **مثال 12**

هذه المرة بتنغيم يشبه تنغيم قراءة المقاتل الحسينية“ (ص55)  
 (Ex.12) “this time in the tone of those who recite tragic stories about the death of Hussein in Shiite meeting halls”(p44)

Exoticism in translation serves as a technique to maintain the cultural distinctiveness of the source text (ST) within the target text (TT). This method prioritizes the source culture’s portrayal rather than adapting to the target culture. Consequently, it consistently conveys the distinctive attributes of the source culture and its inherent cultural uniqueness. This aspect often becomes a prominent feature of the TT’s appeal, as evidenced in translations of classical Arabic literature deliberately emphasizing exoticism. The translation of specific novel segments offers examples of culture-specific elements encountered during this process.

**Example 13:**



Here is another example which shows an exotic traditional habit in the TT,

مثال 13

”إنها تكرم ضيفاً خاصاً وتفي بنذر قديم. تسوط العجوز القدر وتردد مع نفسها:

نعمة وسلام من الله ابينا والرب يسوع المسيح الذي أحينا قبل ان نحية“

لقد اكتسبت الكثير من عادات الحي الذي تسكن فيه، لذا نظرت الى الامر على انه نذر تفي به الان“ (ص71)

(Ex.14) “The old woman known as *Um Daniel*, or *Daniels mother*” (p5)

مثال 15

”لولا بعض سكانه المباركين ومنهم ام دانيال“ (ص15)

(Ex.15) “Elishvas presence that if it weren’t for those inhabitants who had *Baraka-spiritual power*”(p9)

مثال 16

(Ex.13) “She was honoring a special guest and fulfilling an old vow. As the old woman stirred the kashka, she repeated, “A blessing and peace from god our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us before we loved him.”

Having adopted many of the customs of the neighborhood, Elishiva saw it as a vow she was now fulfilling” (p58)

This can be considered another example of a culture-specific item because of the idea of cultural and religious meaning. Thus, exoticism has been applied when translating the above example.

**Examples (14, 15, 16):**

مثال 14

العجوز إيليشوا ام دانيال (ص11)

”هما من المخابرات او الاستخبارات العسكرية، او من جهة امنية معينة“ (ص96)

(Ex.16) “They were from the *Mukhabarat*, or military intelligence, or some other security agency” (p8)

مثال 17

”أسمها حسب كلام المنجمين، توابع الخوف“ (ص126)

(Ex.17) “These ghosts were called *tawabie al-khouf*”(p108)

Cultural borrowing represents an additional technique employed in translation, involving the direct transfer of an expression from the (ST) to the (TT) without alteration. This process introduces an external element into the TT (Dickins et al., 2002:32). Unlike exoticism, cultural borrowing does not entail modifying the source language (SL) expression to align with the forms of the target language (TL).

In certain instances, the translator determines that preserving a term from the source language (SL) is crucial due to its specificity to the source culture (SC); altering it in translation could misrepresent the original SL intention. Nevertheless, it is essential to ensure clarity for the reader by elucidating its meaning; this can be achieved by including a glossary at the work's conclusion or by employing footnotes (33).

#### Examples 18, 19:

##### مثال 18

”أم سليم“ (ص 15)

(Ex.18) *Umm Salim*”(p9)

##### مثال 19

”ابي انمار“ (ص 19)

(Ex.19) “*Abou Anmar*” (p12)

In Arabic society, the use of the term “Um” or “Abou”(meaning “mother of” or “father of” in English) followed by the name of a person's eldest son (or daughter) is a traditional way of addressing and showing respect to individuals. This practice is deeply rooted in cultural norms and social etiquette. It is important to note that “Um” or “Abou” is context-dependent

and may vary across Arabic-speaking regions and communities. While it is generally a sign of respect, specific customs and norms may influence when and how it is used.

In the first example, the translator uses the term Um and explains this idea to TRs. In the other two examples, the cultural borrowing method is adopted here because it is more engaged with the difference and otherness of the SC.

#### Example 20:

(مثال 20) ”أفف... لقد تأخرت كثيراً.

تأخرت، أنتم تؤخروني كثيراً.. اللعنة!“ (ص 180)

(Ex.20) “Jeeze, I'm running out of time. You wasted so much time, damn it!” (p157)

The translator kept the expression أفف by using “jeez,” a figure of speech, specifically an interjection or exclamation. It is a casual and informal expression often used to show surprise, frustration, disbelief, or emphasis. It is similar in meaning to “wow,” “oh my,” or “goodness.” It is not considered a formal or standard word but a colloquial expression commonly used in spoken language and informal writing to convey a particular tone or emotion.

As stated above, according to Nida, Dynamic Equivalence is grounded in achieving an “equivalent effect,”



signifying that the rapport between the recipient and the message in translation should be substantially akin to what existed between the original audience and the message (1964: 159). Nevertheless, the translator must consider all reasons for not adhering to a literal translation of a specific expression of 'equivalent effect,' particularly normative issues (Dickens et al., 2002:19).

However, dynamic equivalence, aiming for an equivalent effect, must not be employed to diminish the disparity between the source and target culture (TC) in an attempt to create uniformity between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT). The translator should focus not on what needs to be inserted into the TT but on what elements from the source text (ST) can be retained (Dickins et al., 2002:20).

#### Example 21:

In the following Culture-specific items, the translator uses formal equivalence translation:

مثال 21

”بسبب شائعة وجود انتحاري بين صفوف الزائرين“ (ص123)

(Ex.21) A rumor that there was a suicide bomber among the *pilgrims* had caused panic” (p105)

The term الزائرين (*visitors*) is a term used to refer to Thousands of Muslim visitors from all around the world who turned towards Iraq's southern city of Karbala for *Ashura*. The translation does not convey the cultural meaning of “*Al zaireen*,” which is an integral part of *Ashura*, which is a commemoration of the death of Imam Hussein, the grandson of Mohammed, the prophet of Islam, who was killed in the deserts of Karbala over 1,400 years ago. Shiite Muslims mourn his death yearly on the 10th day of Muharram, the first month in the Hijri calendar.

#### **Conclusion**

As explored within this paper, translation is not a simple task, as it involves more than just conveying meanings between two languages; it involves merging and harmonizing two distinct structures. As a result, the translator must operate as both a skilled reader and a conscientious text creator. Theoretical perspectives from scholars such as Newmark, Nida, Baker, and Schleiermacher offer insights into translation theories and methodologies from varying angles. These theories aid translators in navigating translational challenges and discovering potential resolutions. Nonetheless, translators must discern when to apply each theory, even though a single translation may

involve multiple theoretical approaches. The ensuing translation theories and methodologies prove valuable and have been adopted to address the challenges encountered in this research endeavor. Newmark's theory appears pertinent in rendering collocations here: selecting the most suitable collocation in the target language (TL) that captures the intended meaning. For idiomatic expressions, Baker's strategies are helpful: identifying idioms of similar meaning and form, idioms with similar meaning but different forms, or employing paraphrasing.

When dealing with culture-specific elements, the exoticism and cultural borrowing methods proposed by Dickins et al. are utilized to allow the uniqueness of the translated text to surface. However, when retaining linguistic elements and cultural nuances from the source text (ST) becomes challenging, Nida's dynamic equivalence theory, rooted in the principle of equivalent effect, appears most applicable. Above all, translation is a communicative process embedded within a societal framework. The nature of translation may substantially differ based on its functional type, whether it pertains to literary, scientific, religious, or other forms. Challenges invariably arise during the translation of any text. However, it is ultimately the translator

who determines how to navigate the translational difficulties unique to their text, regardless of the guidance provided by translation theorists.



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