Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics (IJAL)
Vol. 25, No. 2, September 2022, 1-19

Translation of Culture-Specific Items: A Case Study of *Les Miserables'* Persian Musical Performance

Aysa Arjmandpour
MA, Department of Foreign Languages, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran
Hossein Bahri*
Assistant Professor, Department of Foreign Languages, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran

Abstract

The novel *Les Miserables* (Hugo, 1985) is one of the most universally translated works, and there are a number of adaptions in several languages. One recent adaption is the Persian musical play performed in Iran. In this performance, culture-specific items (CSIs) were translated differently since visual and aural elements were added on the stage. The aim of the present study is to investigate translation strategies used in the above adaptation to indicate what translation solutions are possible when the medium changes. After watching the ninety-minute recorded play in VOD format, culture-specific items were selected purposively corresponding to those in the novel. Subsequently, they were analyzed based on Newmark's model (1988). The findings showed that the most frequent translation strategies applied were adaptation, followed by communicative translation, and literal translation. Compared with the original performance, some scenes were deleted from the recorded play. Hence, there was no exact one-to-one correspondence with the original text of the book. While instances of censorship contributed to some of these omissions, probably one reason for the issue is the publishing regulations administered in Iran for VOD formats of the plays. These results suggest that while target language-oriented strategies dominated the entire translation approach, the translator of the play tried to familiarize the audience with French culture through literal translations and with the help of visual and aural aids. Since the audience were presented with pictures and songs, it was easier for them to locate themselves in the era of the French Revolution and French customs.

Keywords: adaptation, censorship, culture-specific items, omission, translation strategy

Corresponding author: Department of Foreign Languages, Kharazmi University, No. 43 South Mofateh Ave., Tehran, Iran. *Email address:* hbahri@khu.ac.ir

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

1. Introduction

Audio-medial texts are recognized by Reiss (2000) as the fourth type of text. These texts are written to be heard rather than read. Hence, non-linguistic elements are used along with linguistic ones in this group of texts. They more rely on graphic, acoustic, and visual kinds of expression to impress the audience. Theatrical plays are one instance of this type of text which are mostly adaptations of masterpieces around the world. In order to make a larger audience familiar with these works, they are translated into different languages. Many researchers have referred to them or described them variously in English as "adaptation", "rewriting", "version", "transplanting", "naturalizing", "integrating foreign works", "large-scale amendments", "recreation", and "transposition". This proliferation of terminology suggests that scholars and researchers have been working in isolation, and there is no specific term to encompass all the terms above. While it could be supposed that all the terms broadly refer more or less to the same translation reality or phenomenon, it could equally be argued that they have different semantic shades thereby suggesting various degrees of manipulation of the source text to meet the expectations of the target language audience as well as the requirements of the target culture. Therefore, by analyzing strategies used in translating an adaptation, it becomes evident which term is the most appropriate one and which one is actually applied by the translators.

An example of a masterpiece translated many times up to this day is the novel 'Les Miserables' (Hugo, 1985). Recently, it has been translated from English into Persian in the shape of a musical play performed in Iran. There are differences in translation strategies applied to make this literary piece of text musical including translation of the dialogues, speech style, discourse markers, and so forth. Since visual and aural elements are presented during the play, there is supposed to be a change in the focus of translation. One prominent feature of the text and the play is the culture-specific items (Aixela, 1996; Baker, 2018; Newmark, 1988) of the French Revolution and the French culture. These items are translated differently since the imagination of the audience is about to take shape on the stage with the aid of extra linguistic factors. In contrast, readers of the novel develop a more subjective understanding in comparison to the audience of the performance on the stage.

Translations of a novel and a play, especially a musical one, are different in many ways. If the translation strategies applied do not vary, the audience cannot be deeply connected to the work of art. One other important point to be mentioned is that plays are often translations of already translated novels,

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

which readers have read and are already familiar with the plot, especially the well-known novels throughout the world including *'Les Miserables'* (1985). Without analyzing the linguistic and non-linguistic elements of the play, it cannot be understood whether the audience could identify with the performance or not. Consequently, it is necessary to investigate whether the techniques and devices used are going to be as effective as the novel or not. In other words, translation strategies are to be examined to see what differences exist between translations of these two types of text.

2. Review of Literature

As one of the genres in literature, drama has always attracted the audience to make them more familiar with literary works. "Drama, in general, is any work meant to be performed on a stage by actors. A more particular meaning is a serious play; not necessarily tragedy" (Cuddon, 2013, p. 216). Cuddon (2013) states that a form of drama and a method of presentation, which developed in Germany in the 1920s, is the epic theater. Since then the term "epic theatre" has been most closely associated with Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956). Epic theatre was a break with established dramatic styles. In Brecht's words, the "essential point of epic theatre is that it appeals less to the spectator's feelings than to his reason" (as cited in Cuddon, 2013, p. 241). It denotes a form of narrative/chronicle play which is didactic, which is not restricted by the unity of time and which presents a series of episodes in a simple and direct way: a kind of linear narration. Notable features are the use of a Chorus, a narrator, slide projection, film, placards and music. An epic drama makes use of epic devices mainly a narrator or teller figure. It is epic in the sense that there is a visible and/or audible narrator figure whose presence creates a distinct level of communication (Jahn, 2021, p. 6). One other form of drama is the musical drama. Putting the music along with the words, Dahlhaus states:

> The text, the poem, is—just like the music—understood by Wagner (1848) as a means of the drama, not as its essence. When, therefore, we speak of 'musical dramaturgy'—dramaturgy that makes use of musical means—we should refer only to the function of music in the creation of a drama. Music does not alight from somewhere outside upon a drama that already has an independent existence, but rather the music alone creates the drama, which is that drama of a special kind. (as cited in Berger, 2008, p. 3)

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

Singing, on the other hand, is a medium of self-expression allowing the character to vent his presently experienced affect without connecting it to the past or future. It reveals what happens not between the individual characters but within this individual character who remains unreflective, that is, imprisoned in the present, and passive, that is, interested not in acting, but in passionate self-expression. Music, by contrast, is tied to the place in which it occurs and relates to the moment in which it belongs. Singing is the essence of operatic music, expressing as it does the present moment, and the musical present manifested in it is simultaneously the scenic present. Melodic expression, unlike verbal expression, does not reach beyond the present moment but exists entirely in the given situation; it isolates that situation and lifts it out of its context so that what has gone before recedes into oblivion with no thought given to the consequences which will follow the particular moment (Berger, 2008, p. 4).

Because of the reason that people from different countries seek to familiarize themselves with drama works throughout the world, a number of adaptations are made available from language to language, and culture to culture. A question raised by many scholars is what exactly do we mean by translation or adaptation for the stage? There are several reasons for adaption, namely the adaptor identifies with the story and wants to create his/her own version of it so that the audience can understand the text better than reading the original version. Although adaptation has been practiced since the days of silent movies, it has not been universally accepted. Commentators believe that drama is too wordy to be adapted for the screen. But in recent years, there has been progress regarding cinematic techniques in staging to turn a novel into stage plays or movies. On the other hand, stage plays are filmed for television using the original dialogue, sets, and cast. In Zatlin's (2005) words, the main difference then would be the absence of the audience. By applying non-linguistic elements such as adequate lighting, camera, shots, etc. the spectators can have the same experience as the play audience. Also, adjustments are to be made to place the dialogue into the form required by the target medium. Zuber (1984) distinguishes three categories for play translation as follows:

> In the translation genus, the translator understands the language he is translating from. Within this genus lie three species; one is the literal translation. This has little relevance to the stage. The second species is the direct translation; an attempt to translate the original as if it had been written in the translator's language and yet the structure of the play is not altered, nor the meaning of the words. Direct translation is the most difficult of all and the translator has to constantly

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

> decide between recording the words of the original or giving their meaning. An easier way out is the third species, the free translation where, under the demiurgic impulses of knowing what the author is trying to say, one provides the meaning rather than recording the original words. Often, in this species, content is distorted, new emphasis is applied to the text, and the translated text has a vague but undeniable connection with the original. (p. 14)

After the introduction of these categories, some translators assumed that there were supposed to be some translation theories underlying the translation of the plays. However, there are more aspects to a play than just a mere rendering of the text. First of all, it must be performable, and also non-linguistic factors are to be added to the translated text depending on the culture of the target language. Wellwarth (1981), insisting on the importance of the style, stated that "No audience will give its full attention to a play whose dialogue is stilted." (as cited in Zatlin, 2005, p.2). Years later, Zuber mentioned that "The translated play, unlike the novel or poem, must be speakable. If anything destroys an audience's interest in a play it is a dialogue that sounds translated." (1984, p. 15). Bassnett (1985) declares that "The distinction between a 'version' of an SL text and an 'adaptation' of that text seems to me to be a complete rendering. For example, if we consider the term "adaptation," it would be necessary to know specifically what is being adapted. Is it the action, space, time, culture-bound expression, style, etc. that is being adapted or does the process involve all of these aspects taken together? Do all these aspects call for the same strategies and procedures? And then, how are these strategies and procedures different from those used to effect translation proper?" (as cited in Che Suh, 2002, p.52).

Theatre semiotics has also contributed significantly to this debate. Elam (1980) asserts the repercussions of semiotics in all domains by stating that: of all recent developments in what used to be confidently called the humanities no event has registered a more radical and widespread impact than the growth of semiotics. Investigating through semiotics allows the translator to better choose the appropriate method of translation, but also to situate them within the sign systems of the target language. In this way, not only the linguistic elements but also the non-linguistic elements are transformed to the audience. Hence, the importance of the signs is manifested and indicated in the translated text. Subsequently, the translator can conduct a systematic comprehensive analysis of the text at both macro and micro levels to be able to translate as many extra-linguistic and meta-textual elements as possible. By doing the analysis, spatial-temporal setting, communicative situation, relationships between characters, and general attitudes become evident (Che Suh, 2002, pp. 51-57).

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

Regarding the above-mentioned definition, there is debate about the theoretical framework of translation of an adapted piece of work. It is not still clear whether to maintain the foreign features of the target language and culture or to be faithful to the source language. This polarized orientation may not set the scene for intermediate translations between the two extremes. Another point to be highlighted here is that the translations of plays are derived from institutional and organizational forces rather than the active decision-making of the translator him/herself. For instance, Bassnett (1991) declares that "translators are commissioned to produce what are termed 'literal' translations and the text is then handed over to a well-known playwright with an established reputation so that larger audiences will be attracted into the theatre." (as cited in Che Suh, 2002, p.56) Therefore, it becomes clear that the choice of linguistic and non-linguistic elements is not made by the translator, but by the translation initiator as an example.

There exist many cultural references in the translation of dramas from one language to the other. In many translated works, one prominent element is the culture-specific items. Some culture-specific items reflect the cultural setting in which they occur. If the cultural settings of the source and target languages are significantly different, there will be instances when the source text will contain items which convey what to the target reader would be unfamiliar associations of ideas. Such culture-specific items express ideas previously unexpressed in the target language. Like culture-specific collocations, they point to concepts which are not easily accessible to the target reader. "Translation of culture-specific collocations involves a partial increase in information. This is unavoidable inasmuch as unfamiliar associations of ideas cannot simply be introduced in a target text without giving the reader some hint as to how to interpret them" (Baker, 2018, pp. 66, 67). It is advised for theatrical translators to watch and listen to their own translation like the audience. During the rehearsals, especially, they can understand the problems and inconsistencies of the text including rhythms, stress, pauses, and so forth. In general, there is a radical change towards translation in the post-Chomskyan era. After comparative linguistics introduced a framework for translation theory, the trend is to take dynamic responses into consideration. Since there are differences in style and theater conventions from nation to nation, the translator is supposed to take all these considerations into account. (Zatlin, 2005, pp. 2-6)

Zuber (1984) defines the term "transposition" as a special kind of translation which means "transposing" or "transferring" the dramatic text on to the stage when translating a play. It is different from translating poetry or prose since plays are written to be actable and speakable rather than readable.

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

As a result, non-verbal and cultural factors as well as staging problems must be paid attention to. Zuber (1980) demonstrates that "the meaning of a play can be distorted and misinterpreted if the translator fails to appropriately transpose the whole network of symbolic signs into the target culture: visual and acoustic as well as linguistic signs." So the translator must try to transfer all the visual and acoustic signs. The transformation can be achieved through maintaining the original signs, or through a combining sign which signifies the same idea. On the other hand, the translator can produce a reading edition accompanied by notes in order to fully and clearly explain the meaning and ambiguities of the signs. In this way, the harder task is on the shoulders of the producer, actors, and readers to transpose these signs. Here, the translator acts as a mediator who has full awareness of the original text and can actively participate in transferring the text onto the stage. (Zuber, 1984, pp. 8, 9). Translating culture-specific items has always been a debatable field throughout the history of translation:

> The central problem of translating has always been whether to translate literally or freely. The argument has been going on since at least the first century B.C. up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, many writers favored some kind of free translation: the spirit, not the letter; the sense, not the words; the message rather than the form: the matter not the manner. Then at the turn of the nineteenth century, when the study of cultural anthropology suggested that the linguistic barriers were insuperable and that language was entirely the product of culture, the view that translation was impossible gained some currency, and with it that, if attempted at all, it must be as literal as possible. This view culminated in the statements of the extreme literalists Walter Benjamin and Vladimir Nabokov. The argument was theoretical: the purpose of the translation, the nature of the readership, and the type of text, were not discussed. Too often, writer, translator and reader were implicitly identified with each other. (Newmark, 1988, p. 45)

Newmark (1988) has suggested eight translation strategies applicable to translating culture-specific items:

1. Word-for-word Translation: The most common meanings are transferred, out of context, and Word-order is preserved as the original.
2. Literal Translation: There is one-to-one correspondence on the level of lexis, but grammatical structures are translated to nearest equivalents.

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

3. Faithful translation: Contextual meanings are precisely reproduced based on TL grammatical constraints.
4. Semantic translation: In this kind of translation, emphasis is given to aesthetic values.
5. Adaptation: As the 'freest' kind of translation, it is mostly applied to plays where SL culture is transferred to TL culture.
6. Free translation: The matter is reproduced without the manner, and the content is reproduced without the SL form.
7. Idiomatic translation: The translator intends to reproduce the SL 'message' in terms of colloquialisms and idioms which do not exist in the original.
8. Communicative Translation: The exact SL contextual meaning is preserved. (Newmark, 1988, pp. 45-47)

An analysis of culture-specific items in the Persian Translation of "Dubliners" suggested that among all strategies, the translator used general words and borrowing more than other strategies to cope with the lexical gap. These strategies were applied by the translator to make his translation more authentic and tangible. Although in some cases one or more strategies are suggested for each domain, it does not mean that a translator should choose only a certain method or strategy of translation (Hosseini & Davtalab, 2011).

Persson (2015) made evident in his research that the frequency of each translation procedure depends on the type of culture-specific item and the chosen translation method. It was argued that transfer is the most commonly used procedure, and for the category of CSI, neutralization is the most commonly used (as cited in Jalali, 2015). Jalali's (2015) research investigating frequent translation strategies in subtitles illustrates how Iranian translators translate metaphorical expressions using Newmark's seven proposed strategies. The findings reveal that Iranian subtitlers try to create an understandable translation in the target language using established strategies. Based on the statistical analysis, Newmark's first strategy is the most frequent one, rendering by creating the same image in the TL.

Amininadji (2016) conducted research on translation strategies in Bahram Beyzai's play "Marionettes". Based on the results, "ecology" was the most applied strategy, after material and social culture. Also, he mentions that domestication prevails over foreignization since the translation strategy used reflects the social and cultural trends in the society. Indeed, domestication is preferred as it helps

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

target text readers to understand the text easily. However, there is a tendency for the target-text reader to welcome unfamiliar culture-specific items as globalization leads people to interact with one another.

In the analysis of translation strategies applied in translating culture-specific items in Martin Lindstrom's "Brand Sense", it was concluded that the genre of the book under analysis determined that the prevailing translation strategies to render CSIs were literal translation, localization, preservation, and addition. There was no mention of omission examples. Although the translation of common expressions required employing a great variety of strategies, the translator's inconsistency and the lack of editing have resulted in a deteriorated quality of the translation. The aforementioned inconsistencies were observed in almost all groups of culture-specific items found in the book (Blazyte & Liubiniene, 2016).

Research on translation of culture-specific items from English into Persian in the translation of Othello revealed that the translator used different translation strategies based on Newmark's model (1988) and Venuti's theory (1995/2008). The most applied strategy by the translator was cultural equivalent, while reduction was shown to be low in percentage. Among the procedures proposed by Venuti, the domestication strategy was used more than foreignization. Therefore, it can be argued that the translator used cultural equivalents to make his translation more readable for target readers. Moreover, the researchers concluded that the use of a combination of Newmark's model and Venuti's theory were appropriate models for translating this masterpiece (Alipour & Hadian, 2017).

In a study, in which the novel etitled "Baba Evi" by Orhan Kemal was analyzed based on Newmark's model, culture-specific items were reported to pose challenges in translation across cultures. The critical strategy turned out to be the "absolute universalization". It is not considered a domestication strategy since the new sign in the target text is free from all cultural associations, eliminating the CSI value of that sign in the target text. As a result of this synthesis, it was found that most culture-specific items were translated through foreignization rather than domestication. And some were translated using none of the strategies proposed. Hence, literary translators should be prepared for the pitfalls created by culture-specific items in literary texts, and they should be well aware of translation strategies for culture-specific items, which could guide them through the whole act of translation (Kuleli, 2020).

A study drawn on Newmark's model to investigate two Persian translations of the culture-specific items in Roald Dahl's "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory", concluded that the two Iranian translators used almost all of Newmark's translation procedures. Among these, "cultural equivalence" was the most frequently used, whereas "reduction and expansion" was the least frequently used one. Since "cultural

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

equivalent" seems to be the most effective procedure, the translators have tried to simplify the target text and make it relatable to general readers. (Karimnia & Gheshlagh, 2020)

In another research, Rouhi and Niami (2021) detected two hundred twenty-two culture-specific items in the corpus of "Gulistan". The findings indicated that "synonymy" was the most frequently employed strategy by the native and non-native translators. Also, the researchers found that transference had been used more frequently by the latter in comparison to the native translators. As a result, if the readers do not have sufficient knowledge of the source culture, there is a risk that the content of the text will not be fully understood.

In a study of Lithuanian-dubbed animated films, it was illustrated how translators translated metaphorical expressions using Newmark's seven proposed strategies by using authentic examples from three series of the animation Hotel Transylvania. The results showed that subtitlers tried to create an understandable translation in the target language, a translation where the audience generally grasps the original message in the films. One of the issues translators had to overcome was cultural differences since translation mistakes occur through misconceptions or blindness to cultural differences. Hence, another finding was that translators tried to use established strategies so as to create a translation with fewer mistakes. Based on the analysis of the data, Newmark's first proposed strategy (word-for-word translation) was the most frequently used by translators. Indeed, this strategy aims to transfer the same image to the target text while taking the register, the frequency and the status of the original expression into account. The results of this investigation also demonstrated that translators of the selected films tended to apply foreignization more extensively than domestication. Culture-specific items were preserved in the translation maintaining the authenticity of the films and, at the same time, allowing the target culture viewers to gain new insights and expand their existing cultural awareness through the culture-specific items (Pagrandyte & Astrauskiene, 2021).

In the analysis of translating Islamic texts, it became known that Newmark's translation procedures were effective in making the translation sound more natural to the target reader. Newmark's strategies are not limited to the cultural features of the language, but they also cover the linguistic specifications. Finally, it may be concluded that Newmark's translation strategies are necessary for the translation of an Islamic text between two different language systems and cultures. However, the translator must be competent in using translation strategies to provide an accurate translation. The findings suggest that the use of the cultural equivalent strategy was the most frequently applied strategy,

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

followed by descriptive equivalent, transference, functional equivalent, componential analysis, synonymy, modulation, and notes. (Rahman, 2023)

Identifying cultural perspectives in Parvin E'tesami's poetry revealed that in the majority of cases, the translation strategy of "couplets" was applied. The second most frequent translation strategy was "modulation". The analyses indicated that the translator applied a literal translation besides different strategies to convey the intended meanings and preserve the style of the original poems conveying the thought and information of the Persian poems (Eskandari et al., 2023).

According to the translation of culture-specific items in the selected verses of Al-Baqarah, AL-Imran, and An-Nisa chapters, the cultural equivalent was dominantly used by all three translators, which shows they would like to establish a sense of cultural affinity to the text for the readership. While this indicates how the translators attempted to render culture, in the case of sacred texts with a wide range of readership, the translation of culture should be done with references to intertextuality that among others include exegesis and interpretations (Roodashty et al., 2023).

The above overview indicates that few studies have been conducted in this regard, especially in the field of stage adaptations. With the objective of finding the most applied translation strategy based on Newmark's (1988) model and its implications and limitations, our research questions are as follows:

1. What translation strategies were used in translating culture-specific items of the novel "Les Miserables" from the English text into the Persian theatrical performance on the stage?
2. Which translation strategies contributed more to the adaptation of the Persian theatrical play "Les Miserables" from the original English novel?

3. Methodology

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The present study carried out an analysis and description of translation strategies applied by the translator in the musical play "Les Miserables" from English into Persian, which was adapted from the novel written by Victor Hugo (1985). These strategies were employed in the translation of culture-specific items based on Newmark's model (1988). Through investigation, it can be determined which strategy is

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

the most frequently used and the tendency of the translator towards domestication or foreignization. The theoretical framework of this research is based on what Newmark expressed in his book "A Textbook of Translation" about the translation of CSIs.

3.2. The Corpus of the Study

In this descriptive and product-oriented study, "Les Miserables" along with its Persian adaption was selected as the corpus of the study. The Persian play was performed on the Tehran Royal Hall stage in October and November 2018. However, in this paper, the recorded performance was analyzed, which was published months later in VOD format on streaming platforms including FILIMO and NAMAVA.

Hence, the current comparative study comprised the following:

1. Hugo, V. (1985). *Les Miserables*. (Wilbour, Trans.) New York: Carleton.
2. Parsaei, H. (2018). *Binavayan (Les Miserables)*. Tehran: Royal Hall, Spinas Palace Hotel.

3.3. Summary of "Les Misérables"

Les Misérables is a French historical novel by Victor Hugo, first published in 1862, which is considered one of the greatest novels of the 19th century. Les Misérables has been popularized through numerous adaptations for film, television and the stage. Examining the nature of law and grace, the novel elaborates upon the history of France, the architecture and urban design of Paris, politics, moral philosophy, antimonarchism, justice, religion, and the types and nature of romantic and familial love (Wikipedia, 2024).

Jean Valjean, a former prison convict, endured 19 years of punishment for the seemingly minor crime of stealing a loaf of bread. Upon receiving his release, he dreams of a fresh start, only to find that his past continues to haunt him. His theft of silver from a bishop complicates matters, but when the bishop covers for Valjean, a new chapter begins. As Valjean evades Inspector Javert's relentless pursuit, he dedicates himself to caring for Cosette, a young woman with a troubled background. Together, they flee to Paris, escaping Javert's watchful eye. However, fate reunites them during the tumultuous events of the Parisian barricades. Amid love, tragedy, and unlikely alliances, Les Misérables portrays the convergence of different social classes in their shared struggle for survival.

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

After watching the whole recorded ninety-minute Persian play, we identified the culture-specific items, which were corresponding to English segments in the novel. The items were selected based on Newmark's model (1988) proposed for translation strategies. The strategies were as follows:

1. Word-for-Word Translation
2. Literal Translation
3. Faithful Translation
4. Semantic Translation
5. Adaptation
6. Free Translation
7. Idiomatic Translation
8. Communicative Translation

Subsequently, the selected items were grouped respectively in three tables, each one representing the items in one thirty-minute part of the recorded play. Later, they were analyzed to determine which translation strategy had been applied. The sampling method used was purposive sampling and all the thirty-eight culture-specific items were selected non-randomly from the beginning of the show up to the end.

4. Results and Discussion

A total number of thirty-eight culture-specific items were identified and selected from the Persian musical theater "Les Miserables" adapted from the English Book "Les Miserables" (1985). Subsequently, culture-specific items were analyzed based on Newmark's model (1988), and the frequency and percentage of each translation strategy used for the items including word-for-word, literal, faithful, semantic, free, idiomatic, communicative translation and adaptation were specified in Table 1 followed by a presentation of CSIs and their translations in Appendix 1 divided in three thirty-minute segments of the show.

According to Table 1 the most frequent translation strategy applied for translating culture-specific items (both English and French items) was adaptation (36.9%). This is in line with what Newmark (1988)

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

states in his textbook regarding adaptation, which is used mainly for translation of plays and poetry. In this strategy, the themes, characters, plots are kept and the SL culture is changed to TL culture and the text rewritten. A closer look at our analysis indicates that translation by performance and omissions significantly contributed to the increase in the frequency and percentage of adaptations. Since the written text has been transformed into a performance, most culture-specific items were translated by performance which means the dialogues, clothing, signs, sounds, and the general atmosphere were not translated word by word, but were shown through visual and aural instruments including instance numbers 1, 3, 6, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15, 20, 25, 28, 31, 35 and 36. In this way, the audience can perhaps find a chance to get themselves familiarized with the French culture including their clothing, ritual ceremonies, the Great French Revolution, and so forth. For instance, there were several references to the word 'cook-shop' which was not translated but the whole decoration of a French café was set on the stage, or instead of describing the character of 'Javert', the French police uniform and facial expressions of the actor were shown to the audience. Even, 'Adaptation' was perhaps a contributing element to some extent for those culture-specific items translated using other translation strategies since the elements existing on the stage and the pictures screen-played were presented to the audience during the whole show.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Translation Strategies

Translation Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
1. Word-for-word	___	___
2. Literal Translation	11	28.95%
3. Faithful Translation	3	7.9%
4. Semantic Translation	___	___
5. Adaptation	14	36.9%
6. Free Translation	1	2.6%
7. Idiomatic Translation	1	2.6%
8. Communicative Translation	8	21.05%

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

One important point to be mentioned is that the sentences and dialogues of the book were translated into Persian musical theater in the shape of poems and lyrics, but the original text is not musical itself. Hence, the written text was translated into the oral rhythmic words, and third-person subjects in the book were turned into one-person subjects in the play in order to preserve the rhyme of the songs as in instance numbers 4, 10, 12, 13, 22, and 34.

It should also be noted that several sections of the book were summarized, deleted or censored in the play; therefore, there was no exact one-to-one correspondence to do the exact comparative analysis. As portrayed in Table 1, there were no instances found for 'word-for-word' and 'semantic translation'. One reason for the lack of these strategies and using alternative options might be that the translator intended to preserve the rhyme in the musical dialogues. Thus, the exact words could not be translated, but other words which could be matched in terms of rhyming dialogues would be uttered. Another reason could be due to the duration of the performance. The original novel has more than two thousand pages, but the running time of the performance was only one and a half hours. As a result, not all the sections of the book were presented in the performance, nor the translated segments were fully corresponding to the original text. Although censorship might be one of the contributing factors, timing plays a major role in this case. Hence, the dialogues were shorter and the scenes performed on the stage were a summary of the actions taken place in the novel.

It should be taken into consideration that the recorded performance published in Iranian streaming VOD services such as NAMAVA and Filimo is shorter in duration than the actual performance played on the Royal Hall Stage. Again, this might be due to censorship after several revisions which led to more omissions in the translated text, causing 'Adaptation' to be the most frequent translation strategy applied. That is maybe the reason why the director of the musical performance has decided to put much effort into the visual and aural instruments including showing images of the streets of Paris, the cathedral, and the fortress on the screenplay. Also, background sounds such as the church bell was played by the orchestra to make the audience much closer to the French atmosphere, especially during the French Revolution.

There were also three culture-specific items used the English novel (1985) (instances number 3, 8 and number 36 in Appendix 1) which did not exactly exist in in the performance. There was not any translation strategy suggested by Newmark for this kind of omission; however, omission in translation can indeed be considered a type of adaptation. For example, translators may choose to omit certain

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

elements for several reasons such as cultural differences; space constraints; audience considerations; legal or sensitivity issues; or redundancy. Therefore, these items were labelled ‘adaptation’ as well.

The second most frequent translation strategy was ‘literal translation’ (28.95%). Probably, the reason for using literalism is that the translator aimed at introducing French names and terms to the audience, especially when the characters addressed one another. On the other hand, it can be said that the aim of the translator is to preserve cultural items as much as possible to create the same atmosphere as the original novel.

The third most frequent translation strategy used was ‘communicative translation’ (21.05%). This method is used when the exact contextual meaning of the original is translated in a way that both content and form are comprehensible to the audience. Like adaptation, this strategy is a TL-oriented translation method which aims to transfer information rather than emotions.

In general, the translator basically employed target language-oriented strategies (63%) due to space constraints, audience considerations, and censorship, and at the same time used source language-oriented strategies of literal translation and faithful translation (37%) as well as songs and pictures to familiarize the audience with French culture and atmosphere.

Our findings are in line with those of Alipour and Hadian (2017), Amininadji (2016) and Karimnia and Gheshlagh (2020) who found that for translation of CSIs domestication prevails over foreignization as it better conforms to the social and cultural norms in the target society and is more comprehensible to the target readers. However, the results of the current study do not support some of the previous research findings including those of Hosseini and Davtalab (2011), Kuleli (2020), Eskandari et al. (2023), and Pagrandyte and Astrauskiene (2021) who showed that culture-specific items were translated through foreignization rather than domestication. A possible explanation for this might be that some translators apply a literal translation strategy to convey the intended meanings and preserve the style of the original poems and the thought and information in poetry or literary translation. Hence, if the readers have sufficient knowledge of the source culture, the translator can opt for a source-oriented strategy such as literal or faithful translation. As some scholars (Blazyte & Liubiniene, 2016; Rahman, 2023; Rouhi & Niami, 2021) have suggested, in many cases, it is the genre of the work, which determines the prevailing and the most appropriate translation strategies to render CSIs. There are, however, other possible reasons. For example, Li (2022) explains how Su Manshu’s activism in the adaptation of Les Misérables using target-oriented strategies of adaptation, addition and omission created a manipulated

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

text to serve his own aesthetic and political ends. Consequently, as was shown, for the translation of plays and audio-medial texts such as the one investigated in the present study, a relatively balanced combination of both domestication and foreignization strategies might be more successful.

5. Conclusion

The present study investigated the translation strategies applied for translating culture-specific items of the English novel "Les Miserables" (1985) into a Persian musical performance on the stage. The other main objective was to find out the most frequently used strategy for translating this masterpiece. Based on the translation model chosen for data analysis (Newmark's 1988 model), we found that ‘adaptation’ (36.9%), ‘literal translation’ (28.95%) and ‘communicative translation’ (21.05%) strategies occurred more frequently than other strategies, whereas 'word-for-word' and 'semantic translation' were not employed at all. The analysis of examples suggests that despite an overall TL-oriented approach due to many adaptations and cesorship, the translator made attempts to preserve the same atmosphere of the original text. Moreover, most cultural items were presented through visual and aural aids on the stage. The translator also used some techniques such as omission which is regarded as a means of adaptation in Newmark's model (1988).

On the other hand, there was limited access to the recorded performance due to copyright issues, and the recorded play provided to the public was different from the actual performance on the stage in terms of duration and content. The reason could be the censorship of the recorded play after revisions; as a result, it imposed some limitations on the analysis of this research.

A final cautionary note that should be sounded here is that Newmark’s (1988) model is a framework, which provides general methods or strategies used by the translator not the specific techniques or procedures adopted within each method. To provide a more comprehensive analysis, there needs to be a wider range of models and strategies applied (e.g., Ranzato, 2013 & 2016). Further research in the same domain will indicate the adequacy of each applied model.

References

Aixelá, J. F. (1996). Culture-specific items in translation. In Alvarez, R. and Vidal, C. A. (eds.) *Translation, Power, Subversion*. Clevedon: Multilingual Maters, pp. 52-78.

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

Alipour, F., & Hadian, B. (2017). Translation Strategies of Culture-specific Items from English into Persian in Translation of "Othello".

Amininadji, O. (2016). A study of culture specific items and translation strategies in Bahram Beyzai's play "Marionettes".

Baker, M. (2018). *In Other Words* (3 ed.). New York: Routlege.

Berger, K. (2008). *Carl Dahlhaus's Conception of Wagner's Post-1848 Dramaturgy.*

Blazyte, D., & Liubiniene, V. (2016). Culture-specific Items (CSI) and their Translation Strategies in Martin Lindstrom's Brand Sense.

Che Suh, J. (2002). Compounding Issues on the Translation of Drama/Theatre Texts. *Meta*, 51-57.

Cuddon, J. A. (2013). *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (4 ed.). London and Penguin Group.

Eskandari, S., Behnam, B., Ramazani, A. & Monsefi, R. (2023). Applying Newmark's Strategies in the English Translation of Parvin E'tesam's Poetry with a Cultural Perspective.

Hosseini, M., & Davtalab, H. (2011). An Analysis of Culture-specific Items in the Persian Translation of "Dubliners" based on Newmark's Model.

Hugo, V. (1985). *Les Miserables.* (Wilbour, Trans.) New York: Carleton.

Jahn, M. (2021). *A Guide to the Theory of Drama.* English Department, University of Cologne.

Jalali, M. (2015). Frequent Translation Strategies used by Iranian Translators in Subtitles to Translate Metaphors.

Karimnia, A., & Gheshlagh, N. H. (2020). Investigating Culture-Specific Items in Roald Dahl's "Charlie and Chocolate Factory" based on Newmark's Model.

Kuleli, M. (2020). Culture Specific Items in Literary Texts and their Translation based on "Foreignization" and "Domestication" Strategies.

Li, L. (2022). Su Manshu’s Adaptation of Les Misérables: The Manipulation of a Bridging Text in an Activist Translation. *Translation and Literature*, 31, 35-51. DOI: 10.3366/tal.2022.0493

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]

Newmark, P. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation.* Prentice-Hall International.

Pagrandyte, R., & Astrauskiene, J. (2021). Translation of culture-specific items in Lithuanian-dubbed animated films.

Parsaei, H. (2018). *Binavayan (Les Miserables)*. Tehran: Royal Hall, Spinas Palace Hotel.

Rahman, A. U. (2023). Exploring Translation Strategies: A Content Analysis of the English Translation of the Holy Quran.

Ranzato, I. (2013) *The translation of cultural references in the Italian dubbing of television series*. PhD Thesis. Imperial College London.

Ranzato, I. (2016) *Translating culture specific references on television. The case of dubbing*. New York and London: Routledge.

Reiss, K. (2000). *Translation Criticism - The Potentials & Limitations.* (E. F. Rhodes, Trans.) New York: Routledge.

Roodashty, M., Mozaheb, M. A., & Ghajarieh, A. (2023). Translation of Culture-Specific Items in Three Chapters of the Holy Quran: The Case Study of Translators with Different L1 Backgrounds.

Rouhi, M., & Niami, M. (2021). Strategies Applied by Native and Non-native Translators to Transfer Persian Culture-Specific Items: A Case Study on Saadi's Gulistan.

Venuti, L. (1995/2008). *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation.* London and New York: Routledge.

Zatlin, P. (2005). *Theatrical Translation and Film Adaptation: A Practitioner's View.* NewYork: Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data.

Zuber, O. (1984). *Page to Stage - Theatre as Translation.* Amsterdam.

[Downloaded from c4i2016.khu.ac.ir on 2026-11-04]

[DOR: 20.1001.1.17351634.2022.25.2.1.1]