

# Rendering Culture-Specific Items (CSIs) in Translating Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* From English Into Arabic

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**Abstract**—This paper examines the process of translating culture-specific items (CSIs) from English into Arabic in the Nigerian play *Death and the King's Horseman* by the Nobel Prize laureate Wole Soyinka. Anglophone African literary texts, particularly those rooted in indigenous belief systems and oral traditions, present unique challenges for translators due to their dense cultural and linguistic layers. Research on English–Arabic translation has largely centered on Western texts, while Anglophone African literature remains underexplored despite its distinct hybrid linguistic and cultural features. This study advances the field by examining the translation of CSIs in Nigerian literature as a double transposition process (Bandia, 1993). This study draws on Nida's (1964) cultural categorization, Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) translation procedures, and Venuti's (1995) concepts of domestication and foreignization. Through a descriptive and comparative analysis of representative CSIs, including ecological, material, social, religious, and linguistic categories, this research explores the translation problems encountered, the procedures employed, and the translator's orientation. The findings reveal that religious and social CSIs are most prevalent, often leading to untranslatability and semantic loss. The translator employed a variety of procedures with a strong tendency toward domestication, while still preserving culturally significant foreign elements to sustain original cultural flavor. Moreover, the paper concludes that translating African literary texts into Arabic involves complex negotiations between cultural adequacy and reader accessibility. This study contributes to the field of translation studies of Anglophone African literature by shedding light on how cultural and linguistic asymmetries are negotiated in Arabic translations, offering practical insights for cross-cultural translation practice.

**Index Terms**—culture-specific items (CSIs), translation studies, Anglophone African Literature, challenges, procedures

## I. INTRODUCTION

Translation, in its broadest sense, is an act of cross-cultural understanding and negotiation (Rosman & Rubel, 2020). It helps different societies to become familiar with 'otherness' (Habtoor & Al-Qahtani, 2018). As Torop (2002) observes, translation is "inseparable from the concept of culture" (p. 593). This is especially relevant when dealing with culture-specific items (CSIs), including proverbs, religious expressions, and historical references, which demand strategies that go beyond mere linguistic transfer to ensure both adequacy and acceptability (Kastrati & Zaçellari, 2022). In recent years, translation studies have shifted from a purely linguistic orientation toward cultural perspectives (El-Dali, 2011; Bassnett, 2003).

The interplay between translation and culture has thus become increasingly central, particularly when CSIs are at stake. Culture-specific items (CSIs) are defined as concepts that are specifically associated with a given culture and lack direct equivalents in other cultures and languages (Baker, 2018; Aixelá, 1996). CSIs remain among the most challenging elements in translation (Blažytė & Liubinienė, 2016; Ordudari, 2007). These challenges intensify in African-English texts, where distinct varieties of English convey hybrid cultural identities rooted in indigenous oral traditions (Bandia, 2008).

In the context of Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, translation plays a crucial role in rendering deeply rooted Yoruba cultural and ritualistic practices, such as ritual suicide, ancestral veneration, and oral praise poetry, into other languages. The play epitomizes Nigeria's cultural complexity, where indigenous beliefs intersect with Islamic and Christian traditions (Nigeria Fact Sheet, 2012). This cultural multiplicity illustrates how translation is not simply a linguistic act but an interpretive process that negotiates between overlapping worldviews. As Torop (2002) argues, translation is inseparable from culture, for it is through the incorporation of new texts that cultures both innovate and

reaffirm their specificity. The present study investigates the translation of CSIs from African-English into Arabic in Soyinka's play. As an Anglophone Nigerian text, *Death and the King's Horseman* embodies a rich cultural and linguistic landscape that contains numerous CSIs where oral traditions, hybrid language varieties, and symbolic practices converge (Pereltsvaig, 2011).

Despite the vast research on English–Arabic translation, most studies have focused on texts rooted in Western cultural contexts, while Anglophone African literature remains limited. Several studies have examined the translation of CSIs from English into Arabic and vice versa in different literary contexts (Ali, 2024; Aljabri, 2020; Habtoor & Al-Qahtani, 2018; Zahrawi, 2018; Zeghar & Benlakdar, 2022; Zitouni, 2022). However, no published studies were found that specifically investigate the translation of CSIs from African-English into Arabic. The existing studies that focus on African works' translation are very scarce (Anber, 2016; Bandia, 2008; Harmoush et al., 2023; Lindfors, 2015; Tervonen, 2007; Tymoczko, 2007). Prior works on Europhone African literature have noted that it is inherently translational: African authors transpose their cultures into European languages, creating a “double transposition” when their works are later translated into another language (Bandia, 1993). This dual process presents unique challenges, especially in preserving cultural resonance, oral heritage, and postcolonial identity. Consequently, the translation of CSIs from African-English into Arabic constitutes a critical yet neglected area of inquiry. Addressing this gap not only enriches our understanding of how translation strategies address cultural challenges but also sheds light on the broader implications of translating postcolonial African texts, where CSIs function as carriers of cultural identity, historical memory, and linguistic innovation.

This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the translation of CSIs in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, a play filled with cultural items, the core of this study, showcasing Yoruba culture's beauty, such as drumming, dancing, symbolic clothing, and religious rituals (Kemi & Chijioke, 2017). It is a rich literary work with a multilingual nature, including Standard English, Nigerian Pidgin English, and Yoruba, exemplifying the challenges of translating Anglophone African literature (Josphine, 2011; Migliavacca, 2018). By analyzing CSIs, this research examines how translators negotiate semantic and cultural asymmetries when translating African-English texts into Arabic.

To systematically explore these issues and uncover the translator's decision-making process, this study draws on Nida's (1964) cultural categorization, Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) translation procedures, and Venuti's (1995) concepts of domestication and foreignization. It adopts a Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) approach to examine the Arabic translation of CSIs in *Death and the King's Horseman*. This framework enables a structured exploration of the translation problems encountered, the strategies employed, and the intercultural complexities influencing the integrity of the translated text. Accordingly, this research is guided by the following questions:

1. What types of CSIs are found in the selected Anglophone African literary work?
2. What are the problems encountered when translating CSIs from Anglophone African literary work into Arabic, particularly within Nida's cultural categories (linguistic, social, religious, material, and ecological)?
3. How are Vinay and Darbelnet's translation procedures applied to the Arabic translation of CSIs from Anglophone African literature?
4. How do cultural differences between Africans and Arabs influence the adequacy and acceptability of the Arabic translations of CSIs?

By addressing these questions, the study not only identifies the procedures and difficulties encountered but also deepens understanding of how postcolonial literatures, especially Anglophone African literary works, are negotiated and represented in Arabic translation, offering new insights for cross-cultural translation practices.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, various studies have examined the translation of culture-specific items (CSIs), particularly in literary texts, which are rich with culturally bound expressions (Ali, 2024; Aljabri, 2020; Habtoor & Al-Qahtani, 2018; Kuleli, 2019; Zahrawi, 2018; Zeghar & Benlakdar, 2022; Zitouni, 2022). Some studies focus on identifying the challenges involved in translating CSIs, while others explore the strategies used to overcome these challenges. The collective findings indicate that CSIs remain one of the most persistent challenges in literary translation due to the deep-rooted cultural differences between the source and target languages (Harmoush et al., 2023; Kuleli, 2019; Zitouni, 2022). Furthermore, Ali (2024), Habtoor and Al-Qahtani (2018), and Zahrawi (2018) considered that dealing with variance between languages, cultural sensitivity, and cultural identity while translating CSIs creates serious problems that may affect the achievement of accuracy and clarity. Moindjie et al. (2025) point out that “cultural-specific items are challenging in translation since they are more difficult to recognize than linguistic aspects and phenomena” (p. 258). Mounassar (2018) and Almubark (2017) also highlighted that cultural differences and the lack of cultural awareness and knowledge significantly impact the accuracy of the translation.

To address these issues, scholars have proposed several strategies and procedures for handling CSIs, including those developed by Nida (1964), Newmark (1988), Aixelá (1996), Vinay and Darbelnet (2000), and Davies (2003). Across previous studies on CSIs' translation, the most commonly observed techniques include footnotes, descriptive translation, and explication, which help convey cultural and contextual information to target readers (Ayyad et al., 2021; Zeghar & Benlakdar, 2022; Zitouni, 2022). Other studies, such as those by Ali (2024), Aljabri (2020), and Zeghar and Benlakdar (2022), identified preservation as a frequently used strategy, especially when translators aim to retain the cultural

essence of the source text. Conversely, omission or deletion tends to be rare (Aljabri, 2020; Zeghar & Benlakdar, 2022), reflecting a general preference for maintaining cultural presence wherever possible.

The findings of Ali (2024) and Kuleli (2019) further emphasized that cultural gaps should not be perceived as insurmountable barriers but as challenges that can be managed through appropriate procedural choices. Both Kuleli (2019) and Zitouni (2022) argued that identifying the skopos or purpose of translation enables translators to select suitable procedures that align with communicative intent. Similarly, Zahrawi (2018) and Zitouni (2022) recommended combining multiple strategies, such as explicitation with descriptive equivalence, when a single procedure fails to capture the full cultural meaning. Almubark (2017) added that exposure to real-life cultural contexts enhances translators' ability to produce accurate and culturally sensitive renditions.

Overall, previous studies highlight that translating CSIs demands a solid theoretical foundation to balance cultural fidelity and reader accessibility. However, little attention has been given to how such frameworks apply to African-English texts translated into Arabic. To address this gap, the present study adopts a multi-theoretical framework that combines three prominent translation theories: Nida's (1964) cultural categorizations, Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) translation procedures, and Venuti's (1995) concepts of foreignization and domestication.

#### A. Nida's Cultural Categorization

Nida's (1964) contribution to translation theory is particularly significant for linking translation with culture. While he is best known for developing the principle of dynamic equivalence, which emphasizes conveying meaning and effect over literal form, his categorization of culture provides a crucial analytical tool for examining culture-specific items (CSIs). Nida (1964) identifies five main cultural categories that often pose challenges in translation: ecological, material, social, religious, and linguistic. These categories help distinguish the different dimensions through which culture manifests in language and guide translators in identifying and addressing potential gaps between source and target cultures. In this study, Nida's cultural classification serves as a framework for analyzing the types of CSIs in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* and assessing how these items are rendered into Arabic.

The translation of culture-specific items (CSIs) represents one of the most complex challenges in translation, as cultural differences often pose greater difficulties than linguistic ones (Nida, 1964, 2015). Nida argues that words derive their meanings from the culture to which they belong, and without sufficient cultural awareness, translators risk distorting meaning or erasing cultural identity. Sharifa (2024) similarly observes that achieving equivalence in culturally dense content requires not only linguistic proficiency but also creative and culturally informed decision-making.

Nida (1964) was the first translator and scholar to offer a cultural approach to translation. His work also underscores that cultural differences often present greater challenges than linguistic ones (Nida, 1964, 2015). He argues that words derive meaning from the cultural systems to which they belong, and that insufficient cultural awareness can lead to distortion or loss of meaning in translation. Sharifa (2024) similarly asserts that achieving equivalence in culturally dense texts requires not only linguistic proficiency but also creativity and cultural sensitivity. By integrating linguistic and ethnological perspectives, Nida was among the first scholars to conceptualize translation as an intercultural act rather than a purely linguistic process. He viewed language as a system of cultural symbols, asserting that effective translation depends on understanding the social and cultural contexts shaping meaning (Nida, 1945, 2003). In this sense, Nida introduced the notion of 'cultural difference' as a central concern in translation studies, offering one of the earliest comprehensive frameworks for analyzing how meaning operates across cultures through his theory of dynamic equivalence.

He (1981) debates that difficulties stemming from 'cultural differences' comprise the most significant challenges confronted by translators, often leading to the most profound misunderstandings among readers. Exploring cultural differences and determining the appropriate way to address them has become one of the key issues in translation and the most important concerns that contemporary translation studies should deal with. Therefore, Nida (1945) outlines that translation problems, which are basically issues of equivalence, can be effectively addressed under five categories: 1) ecology, 2) material culture, 3) social culture, 4) religious culture, and 5) linguistic culture. The following is a diagram representing Nida's equivalence theory and culture categorization in translation.

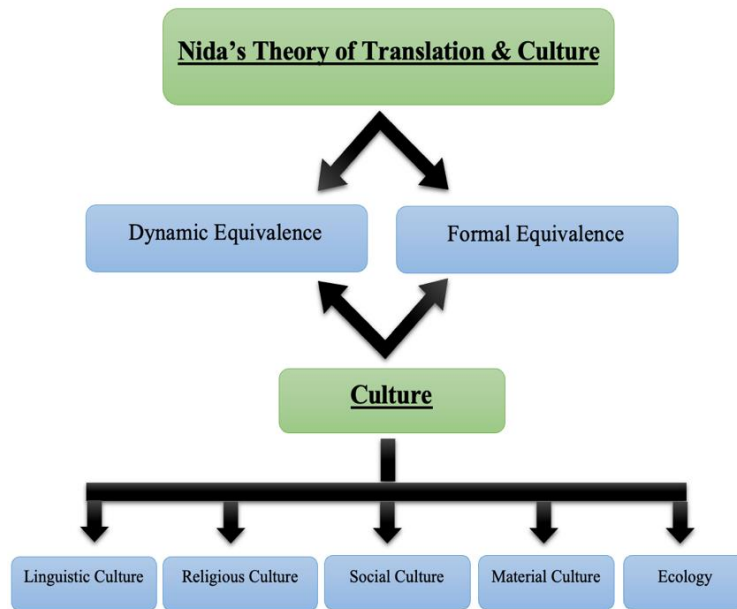


Figure 1. Nida's Theory of Translation and Culture Categorization (1945)

Although Nida's theory has been extensively applied across various language pairs in many studies, this study extends its application by exploring the translation of language varieties, specifically the interplay between standard and nonstandard forms of English, as well as Pidgin, in African literary works. Since the current research investigates the translation of CSIs in a Nigerian play from African-English into Arabic, Nida's (1964) framework is employed to examine how equivalent varieties of English are rendered in Arabic.

*B. Vinay and Darbelnet's Translation Procedures*

Along with Nida's (1964) theory, Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) model of translation procedures is utilized to address the research questions in this thesis. In their taxonomy, translation strategies can generally be categorized into two types: direct translation and oblique translation. Seven categories of translation procedures are under these two; the three subdivisions (borrowing, calque, and literal translation) are under direct translation, and the other four (transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation) are within the oblique translation (Dayter, 2020). According to their methodology, some texts allow for literal, element-by-element translation; however, due to the metalinguistic and structural differences between languages, more complex strategies are often required (Saridaki, 2021).

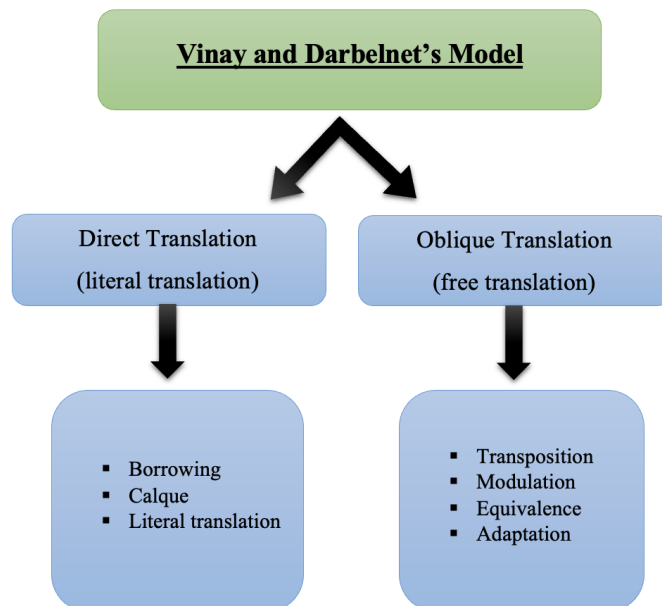


Figure 2. Vinay and Darbelnet's Model of Translation Procedures (1995)

Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) model involves segmenting both the source text (ST) and target text (TT) into translation units, numbering them correspondingly to identify which translation procedure has been used (Alqunaibet,

2019). The 'translation unit' is defined as the smallest segment of an utterance whose elements are so interdependent that they cannot be translated separately (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995).

Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) approach contributes to this study by providing a practical tool for identifying and categorizing the translation techniques applied to culture-specific items (CSIs) in the selected text. When combined with Nida's (1964) cultural framework, it allows for both a qualitative cultural analysis and a procedural linguistic analysis of how cultural meaning is conveyed across languages.

### C. Lawrence Venuti's Theory of Translation

Venuti's (1995, 1998) theory of foreignization and domestication introduces an ideological dimension to translation, emphasizing that it is never neutral but shaped by cultural and political choices. Building on Schleiermacher's (1813) distinction, Venuti argues that foreignization preserves the linguistic and cultural distinctiveness of the source text, while domestication adapts it to target-language norms, often rendering the translator 'invisible' and reinforcing dominant cultural values.

In relation to Toury's (1995) concepts, foreignization aligns with adequacy, maintaining fidelity to the source culture, whereas domestication aligns with acceptability, prioritizing target-reader accessibility. These orientations reveal the translator's ideological stance and the cultural position of the translated text.

In this study, the Arabic translation of *Death and the King's Horseman* is examined through this lens to determine whether the rendering of African-English culture-specific items (CSIs) follows a foreignizing or domesticating approach. As noticed by Bandia (1993), African Europhone literature involves double transposition, from indigenous culture to English, and then from English to another language, such as Arabic. This dual process underscores the complex cultural negotiation in translating African texts. Therefore, this framework helps evaluate how translation negotiates meaning, identity, and cultural visibility. Combined with Nida's (1964) cultural categories and Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) translation procedures, Venuti's (1995) model complements the theoretical foundation for analyzing the linguistic, cultural, and ideological dimensions of translation.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### A. Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design grounded in translation studies. The approach aims to describe, interpret, and evaluate how culture-specific items (CSIs) are translated from African-English into Arabic in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. Myers (2009) states that qualitative research is a thorough investigation of social and cultural phenomena, with a primary focus on the text. Moreover, the qualitative method allows for in-depth exploration of linguistic and cultural nuances, focusing on meaning transfer, cultural equivalence, and the translator's strategies rather than on quantifiable data. As Miles and Huberman (1994) argue, qualitative research concentrates on a detailed exploration of research problems. Overall, a well-structured research design ensures that the study effectively addresses its objectives.

### B. Data Collection

Data were collected through close textual analysis of Soyinka's play and its Arabic translation by Dr. Ali Hagag. Both versions were read line by line to identify and extract culture-specific items (CSIs) that reflect cultural practices, beliefs, and linguistic expressions. Examples include references to rituals, idioms, drumming, clothing, and religious symbolism. Therefore, the data or the sample selection will not be random; rather, coherent passages of text will be selected in accordance with the research design and purpose (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014). The collected data were systematically organized in tabular form, including four columns: (1) ST, (2) TT, (3) transliteration, (4) cultural category, (5) translation procedure, and (6) back translation.

### C. Data Sampling

In this study, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select relevant data, focusing exclusively on textual instances containing culture-specific items (CSIs) to ensure representation of diverse aspects of African culture. Following Nida's (1945, 1964) framework, the identified CSIs were categorized into five cultural categories: ecological, material, social, religious, and linguistic. Among the 338 CSIs identified, 83 were classified as ecological items, 96 as material items, 69 as social items, 76 as religious items, and 14 as linguistic items. These samples encompassed the traditional Yoruba environment, rituals, spiritual beliefs, proverbs, and idioms, reflecting both cultural depth and linguistic variation within the play.

In line with Saldanha and O'Brien's (2014), the more you are able to evaluate, the better, although factors such as cost and time are also significant considerations. It is impossible to include the whole translated text in translation research; rather, one must choose a sample of text for analysis. Accordingly, only illustrative examples from each CSI category were subjected to in-depth analysis, chosen for their representativeness and relevance to the study's objectives. These samples are presented in tabular form, showing the CSIs in both ST and TT, their number, their cultural category, and a contextual note.

#### D. Methods for Analysis

The analysis involves a comparative textual approach. As Williams and Chesterman (2014) state, translated text analysis entails the textual comparison of the translated text with the original text. They also mention that it is impossible to analyze all text aspects in a single research; instead, the study must be confined to a specific dimension. Therefore, the current study is limited to analyzing CSIs taken from the chosen corpus. Each identified CSI is examined in its source and target context to determine how meaning and cultural reference are transferred. The unit of comparative analysis or the coupled pair of the specified translation problems of CSIs in the ST will be analyzed by Nida's (1964) culture categories, and their solutions in the TT will be analyzed by Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) translation procedures model. Then, the findings will be drawn from Nida's equivalence theory to determine if the Arabic translations achieve equivalency. Furthermore, Venuti's (1995, 1998) theory of domestication and foreignization will be applied to assess the cultural orientation of the translator's choices, whether the translation maintains the foreign cultural identity of the ST (foreignization) or adapts it to suit the cultural norms of the TT (domestication).

#### E. Study Corpus

The corpus consists of Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), published by Oxford University Press, and its Arabic translation by Dr. Ali Hagag titled *الموت وفارس الملك /al-mawt w fares al-malk/* published in 1987 by the National Council for Culture, Arts, and Literature. Soyinka, the first African Nobel laureate in Literature, portrays Yoruba cosmology, rituals, and social values through a linguistically hybrid text combining Standard English, Nigerian Pidgin, and Yoruba. Its rich cultural and linguistic layers make it ideal for examining the translation of African-English elements into Arabic. The play's lasting significance is evident in its 2022 Yoruba-language film adaptation *Elesin Oba: The King's Horseman*, directed by Biyi Bandele and distributed by Netflix.

#### F. Procedures

The analytical process proceeded in several stages:

1. The first stage involves the identification and extraction of CSIs from both the source and target texts.
2. The second one contains the categorization of these items based on Nida's five cultural categories.
3. During the third stage, the problems encountered in translating these items are determined, helping to define which cultural category is most problematic and why cultural mismatches occur.
4. Then, Vinay and Darbelnet's translation procedures model is applied to determine the strategy used for each CSI.
5. A comparative analysis is conducted to assess the translation equivalence based on Nida's (1964) Equivalence Theory.
6. Venuti's theory of domestication and foreignization is applied as an additional layer of analysis to determine whether they reflect domestication or foreignization.
7. The final step assesses how cultural differences between Africans and Arabs influence the adequacy and acceptability of CSIs' translation, drawing on the theoretical positions of Venuti (1995, 1998) and Toury (1995).

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of *Death and the King's Horseman* and its Arabic translation reveals complex challenges in rendering culture-specific items (CSIs) that embody Yoruba cosmology, social hierarchy, and linguistic identity. Guided by Nida's (1964) cultural categories, the findings show that ecological, material, social, religious, and linguistic CSIs each present distinct issues of cultural untranslatability, with varying degrees of success in the translator's strategies. In doing so, the analysis highlights how translation problems and strategies impact cross-cultural communication between African and Arabic cultures. It also explores the broader implications of the study for both the translation of CSIs and postcolonial African literary studies.

#### A. Assessment of CSIs' Translation

##### (a). Ecological CSIs

Ecological CSIs reflect natural elements such as flora, fauna, and landscapes, often symbolizing cosmological concepts in Yoruba tradition (Nida, 1946). The study reveals that while the translator recognized the cultural role of ecological culture-specific items (CSIs) in the play, major difficulties arose in conveying their symbolic meanings into Arabic. These challenges stemmed from the environmental and cultural gap between African Yoruba and Arab societies, as well as the absence of equivalent ecological terms in Arabic. Because Yoruba ecological items are deeply tied to spirituality and communal beliefs, their meanings often become reduced or distorted in translation. When ecological and religious CSIs overlapped, the problem of cultural untranslatability intensified. Overall, the findings emphasize the need for culturally sensitive translation strategies to preserve the depth and worldview of Anglophone African texts rooted in indigenous traditions.

Scene 1 in the selected play includes a notable concentration of ecological CSIs, which emphasizes the deep connection between Yoruba cosmology and the natural environment. Expressions like "the great araba" and references to "harvest of yams", "the sap of the plantain", "Oya's riverbed- River", and "the hills of Ileshi" carry profound local and

spiritual significance. When translated into Arabic, many of these terms pose referential absence issues, as they describe environmental features unfamiliar or irrelevant to Arab culture. When translated into Arabic, however, many of these terms encounter referential absence due to unfamiliar environmental contexts, leading to a loss of cultural nuance. Using Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) model, the analysis shows that while various translation strategies were applied, they often failed to fully capture the cultural and spiritual nuances of the source text.

TABLE 1  
EXAMPLES OF ECOLOGICAL CSIS

Source Text (ST)	Translation (TT)	Transliteration	Category	Procedure	Back Translation
Not-I bird (p. 11)	طائر "لمست" – "أنا" (p. 39)	/Tā'ir "Lastu–Anā"/	Ecology	Calque	The "Not-I" bird
a sacred grove (p. 14)	-	-	Ecology	Omission	[Omitted in translation]

The analysis shows that while the translator maintained linguistic accuracy, significant cultural meanings were lost in translating ecological culture-specific items (CSIs) from Yoruba into Arabic. For instance, the "Not-I bird," symbolizing cowardice and avoidance of destiny, was rendered literally as "لمست-أنا طائر," preserving form but losing its mythological depth. A more effective approach in this case might have been the use of a descriptive equivalent or an explanatory footnote, strategies that could have clarified the cultural role and symbolic function of the reference within its indigenous Yoruba context. This aligns with the findings of Zitouni (2022), who argues that footnotes and descriptive strategies are particularly effective in conveying the meaning of culture-specific terms, as they offer additional details that enhance the reader's understanding. In addition, the "sacred grove" was completely omitted, resulting in the loss of its deep spiritual symbolism as a liminal space between life and death in Yoruba belief.

These examples illustrate the limits of source-oriented strategies and formal equivalence, which prioritize literal fidelity over cultural understanding. As scholars like Zitouni (2022), Bassnett and Lefevere (1990), and Wu (2008) note, effective translation of postcolonial African texts requires approaches such as descriptive equivalents, footnotes, or cultural substitution to preserve the symbolic and spiritual dimensions of the original. Overall, the findings emphasize that linguistic accuracy alone is insufficient; successful translation demands deep intercultural awareness to convey the cultural semiotics of Yoruba ecology and worldview.

#### (b). Material CSIs

Material CSIs involve tangible cultural artifacts such as clothing, tools, and ritual objects (Nida, 1946). The analysis of material culture-specific items (CSIs) shows that the translator faced significant challenges in conveying the cultural depth of objects like "alari," "Egungun," and "the constable's baton". These items hold ritual and historical meanings beyond their physical functions. Hence, translating them into Arabic required more than lexical transfer; it demanded cultural mediation, which was often limited by the lack of equivalent referents in Arab culture. These problems are also noted by Shousha (2021), who finds that the problem concerning translating material items arises from the absence of equivalents in the TL. The absence of cultural equivalents in Arabic led to strategies such as adaptation, overgeneralization, and cultural reduction, resulting in loss of symbolic meaning. Below are selected examples and their translations:

TABLE 2  
EXAMPLES OF MATERIAL CSIS

Source Text (ST)	Translation (TT)	Transliteration	Category	Procedure	Back Translation
Alari (p. 9)	القماش الزاهي (p. 36)	/al-qumāsh az-zāhī/	Material	Adaptations	Bright fabric
Egungun (p. 25)	زي القدامي (p. 65)	/zayy al-qudamā'/	Material	Adaptation	Ancient costume
government knickers (p. 34)	عبدًا لحكومة أجنبية (p. 83)	/ eabdan lihukumat ajnabia /	Material	Modulation	slave to a foreign government

The analysis shows that the translator used several strategies—transposition, adaptation, and modulation, to handle material culture-specific items (CSIs), though with limited success. Adaptations such as translating "Alari" as "القماش الزاهي" and "Egungun" as "زي القدامي" made the text accessible but stripped away their ceremonial and ritual meanings. Similarly, the metaphor "government knickers" was rendered as "عبدًا لحكومة أجنبية", effectively conveying political subjugation but losing its humor and sexual undertones.

These examples illustrate how target-oriented domestication, while improving readability, often diminishes the symbolic and ideological depth of postcolonial texts. Overall, the translator's approach leaned heavily toward domestication, prioritizing clarity for Arabic readers but erasing much of the Yoruba culture's distinctiveness, a tendency consistent with Venuti's (1995) critique of domestication. The study concludes that although domestication

facilitates comprehension, translators should combine it with explanatory tools such as descriptive equivalents, footnotes, or annotations to preserve the symbolic richness and cultural authenticity of Yoruba material culture.

(c). *Social CSIs*

Social CSIs reflect social organization, titles, roles, and communal practices. The analysis of social culture-specific items (CSIs) in *Death and the King's Horseman* shows that titles, roles, rituals, and proverbs, such as "Iyaloja", "Elesin Oba", and the "Praise-Singer", are essential in expressing Yoruba social hierarchy and values. However, the translator faced difficulty conveying their layered meanings into Arabic due to the lack of equivalent social references and differing cultural frameworks. For example, translating "Praise-Singer" as "المداح" and "white man's eunuch" as "الأبيض الخصي خادم الاستعمار" clarified the text for Arabic readers but weakened its symbolic, poetic, and ideological depth. This tendency to replace culturally rich metaphors with explicit explanations made the translation more accessible yet less faithful to the original's cultural and artistic texture. As Newmark (1988) warns, prioritizing intelligibility can erase vital cultural nuances. The findings affirm that translating social CSIs in postcolonial texts demands intercultural competence, sensitivity to symbolic meaning, and awareness of the audience's cultural and historical context, echoing the views of Zuo et al. (2025) on the importance of preserving cultural and ideological integrity in translation. Examples demonstrate the translator's negotiation of cultural meaning:

TABLE 3  
EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL CSIS

Source Text (ST)	Translation (TT)	Transliteration	Category	Procedure	Back Translation
Elesin Oba (p. 35)	إيليسين أوبا (p. 85)	/ˈĪlisin ˈŪbā/	Social	Borrowing	Elesin Oba
He who goes early takes the best bargains (p. 17)	وعند الصبح ملعبنا (p. 50)	/wa-ˈinda al-ʃubḥ malabuna/	Social	Equivalence	Our playing field is at dawn

The findings reveal that while the translator employed various strategies, borrowing, adaptation, transposition, modulation, and equivalence, to render social culture-specific items (CSIs), these were often inadequate in bridging the cultural divide between Yoruba and Arabic contexts. For instance, "Elesin Oba" was borrowed as "إيليسين أوبا," maintaining phonetic accuracy but failing to convey the character's ritual role as the King's Horseman. A more effective rendering, such as "إيليسين أوبا، فارس الملك," would have balanced authenticity and clarity. Similarly, translating the proverb "He who goes early takes the best bargains" as "وعند الصبح ملعبنا" altered its meaning from encouragement to confrontation. The Prophetic saying "بورك لأمتي في بكورها" would have more effectively captured its moral intent. These examples confirm, as noted by Zitouni (2022), Baker (2011), and Aixela (1996), that translating social CSIs often requires multiple strategies to account for cultural and contextual nuances.

Overall, the translation demonstrates a strong tendency toward domestication, prioritizing readability and accessibility for Arabic readers at the expense of Yoruba cultural depth. This supports Venuti's (1995) view that domestication, while producing fluent texts, can erase the foreignness and sociocultural richness of the original, resulting in translations that are smooth yet culturally diminished.

(d). *Religious CSIs*

Religious culture-specific items (CSIs), as defined by Nida (1964), refer to elements rooted in the sacred beliefs, rituals, and spiritual practices of a given culture. In Soyinka's play, religion is inseparable from the social, political, and moral structures of Yoruba life, serving as a fundamental element shaping every aspect of communal life. The analysis reveals that religious CSIs in *Death and the King's Horseman* are central to the play's thematic and symbolic framework, reflecting Yoruba cosmology, ritual duties, and spiritual hierarchies. However, these items present serious translation challenges due to the theological gap between Yoruba polytheistic beliefs and Arabic monotheism. Terms such as "Esu", "Ifa", and "Osanyin", as well as metaphors like "the other market" and "seven-way crossroads", were frequently omitted or generalized in the Arabic translation, leading to semantic loss and a weakening of the text's spiritual dimension. This difficulty echoes Alhammad (2011), Shousha (2021), Habtoor and Al-Qahtani (2018), and Khammyseh (2015), who all note that translating religious expressions between belief systems often results in untranslatability due to a lack of equivalents and the sacred sensitivity of such terms. Overall, the findings suggest that translating Yoruba religious CSIs demands not only linguistic skill but also deep theological and cultural awareness to preserve their symbolic and spiritual meanings across cultural boundaries.

TABLE 4  
EXAMPLES OF RELIGIOUS CSIS

Source Text (ST)	Translation (TT)	Transliteration	Category	Procedure	Back Translation
Ifawomi (p. 12)	إفأومي (p. 42)	/ʾĪfāwmī/	Religious	Borrowing	Ifawomi
Seven-way crossroads (p. 42)	الطريق ذا الممرات السبعة (p. 98)	/al-ṭarīq dhā al-mamarrāt al-sabʿa/	Ecology/religious	Calque	road with seven lanes
head and heart of the favourite of the gods (p. 74)	الرأس والقلب المحبين إلى الآلهة (p. 161)	/al-raʿs wa al-qalb al-muḥabbabayn ilā al-āliha/	Religious	Literal Translation	The head and heart beloved by the gods
Esu-harassed day (p. 9)	هذا هو النهار (p. 36)	/hādihā huwa al-nahār/	Religious	Modulation	This is the day
Ifa spoke no more that day (p. 12)	-	-	Religious	Omission	[Omitted in translation]

The findings demonstrate that the translator's handling of religious culture-specific items (CSIs) reflects both a commitment to cultural authenticity and the inherent difficulty of bridging profound theological and conceptual divides. The translator primarily employed direct, source-oriented strategies, borrowing, literal translation, and calquing, such as rendering "Ifawomi" as "إفأومي" and "seven-way crossroads" as "الطريق ذا الممرات السبعة". While these methods preserved phonological and structural integrity, they often failed to communicate the deeper spiritual or symbolic meanings to Arabic readers unfamiliar with Yoruba cosmology. Literal renderings like "الرأس والقلب المحبين إلى الآلهة" risk theological friction within a monotheistic framework, while omissions of items like "Esu" and "Ifa" resulted in partial loss of meaning but helped avoid potential misinterpretation or cultural distortion.

Overall, the translator's approach reflects a tendency toward foreignization, consistent with Venuti's (1995) theory that such strategies resist the domestication of culturally foreign concepts. This method successfully preserves the text's Yoruba religious identity but simultaneously creates conceptual opacity and limits accessibility for target readers. To mitigate this, the findings suggest supplementing foreignized renderings with glosses, paratextual notes, or minimal explanations, as recommended by Sameer and Majeed (2019), to balance fidelity and comprehension. In summary, while the translation maintained surface fluency and cultural integrity, it often fell short in conveying the intricate symbolic, theological, and ritual dimensions of Yoruba spirituality to an Arabic audience.

#### (e). Linguistic CSIs

Linguistic CSIs include proverbs, chants, and oral idioms that carry cultural wisdom. The study reveals that linguistic CSIs in *Death and the King's Horseman*, such as idioms, Pidgin expressions, and Yoruba chants, were difficult to translate due to their deep cultural and oral roots. Many lost their rhythm, tone, and cultural meaning in Arabic, weakening the text's authenticity and expressive power. This supports Zahrawi's (2018) view that figurative and stylistic language is central to preserving a text's cultural identity, and its loss in translation diminishes the author's voice and the cultural essence of the original work.

TABLE 5  
EXAMPLES OF LINGUISTIC CSIS

Source Text (ST)	Translation (TT)	Transliteration	Category	Procedure	Back Translation
Ale le le, awo mi lo (p. 41)	ترانيم النسوة الجنائزية (p. 97)	/tarānīm al-niswah al-janāʾiziyyah/	Linguistic	Adaptation	Funeral chants of the women
Our world is tumbling in the void of stranger (p. 75)	Our world now flounders in the void of strangers (p. 162)	/ʾālamunā al-ān yatakhabaṭ fi farāgh al-ghurabāʾ/	Linguistic/Social	Literal Translation	Our world now flounders in the void of strangers

The findings show that the translator used strategies such as adaptation, modulation, and equivalence to reduce cultural and stylistic loss while maintaining fluency for Arabic readers. However, this domestication-oriented approach often led to the dilution of Yoruba orality and linguistic richness. For instance, the chant "Ale le le, awo mi lo" was adapted as "ترانيم النسوة الجنائزية", preserving its emotional tone but losing its performative and cultural essence. Similarly, literal translations like "عالمنا الآن يتخبط في فراغ الغرباء" retained meaning but not cultural depth. Overall, the translation favored accessibility over authenticity, resulting in a smooth yet culturally muted text. The study therefore recommends a more balanced approach that combines domestication with selective retention of Yoruba terms or explanatory notes to preserve the text's linguistic and cultural vitality.

### B. Adequacy and Acceptability of CSIs' Translation

This section examines how cultural differences between African and Arab contexts influence the translation of culture-specific items (CSIs) in *Death and the King's Horseman*. Drawing on the frameworks of Venuti (1995) and Toury (1995), this analysis highlights the translator's negotiation between maintaining cultural fidelity (adequacy) and ensuring accessibility and acceptance (acceptability) in the target culture. The findings of this study indicate that cultural differences were a decisive factor shaping both the adequacy and acceptability of CSIs' translations, reflecting the translator's role as a cultural mediator.

#### (a). Adequacy: Source-Oriented Strategies

Adequacy refers to the extent to which a translation remains faithful to the source text's cultural, linguistic, and stylistic norms (Toury, 1995). In translating Soyinka's play, source-oriented strategies, such as borrowing, calque, and literal translation, were employed to preserve the distinctive features of Yoruba culture. These strategies align with Venuti's (1995) concept of foreignization and Nida's (1964) formal equivalence, emphasizing cultural fidelity over immediate readability.

For example, the Yoruba spiritual title "Ifawomi" is retained as *إيفومي* /'Īfāwmī/ in Arabic, maintaining its cultural and religious depth. Similarly, "Praise-Singer" is translated literally as *المداح* /al-maddāh/, conveying the functional role but lacking the ritualistic and communal significance inherent in Yoruba tradition. These examples illustrate how source-oriented strategies ensure the preservation of cultural uniqueness, even when such fidelity may challenge Arab readers unfamiliar with Yoruba cosmology. However, it is noted that such strategies could reduce accessibility, sometimes appearing obscure or culturally distant to readers unfamiliar with African spiritual beliefs.

#### (b). Acceptability: Target-Oriented Strategies

Acceptability concerns the extent to which a translation conforms to the linguistic, cultural, and stylistic norms of the target culture (Toury, 1995). To enhance accessibility for Arab readers, target-oriented strategies, including modulation, equivalence, and adaptation, were used. These align with Venuti's (1995) domestication and Nida's (1964) dynamic equivalence, prioritizing readability and cultural resonance over strict adherence to the source text.

Examples include the translation of the CSI "government knickers" into *عبداً لحكومة أجنبية*, clarifying political subjugation for Arab readers, and the Yoruba chant "Ale le le, awo mi lo" rendered as *ترانيم النسوة الجنائزية*, conveying the ceremonial function while omitting rhythmic and linguistic nuances. Such strategies improve comprehension and engagement but may reduce the symbolic depth and spiritual specificity of the original text. It is obvious that these strategies for enhancing readability, though some consider them to oversimplify the cultural richness of the original.

#### (c). Cultural Influence on Translation Choices

The interplay between adequacy and acceptability reflects the broader influence of cultural differences on translation decisions. CSIs deeply embedded in Yoruba cosmology, such as ancestral worship, ritual suicide, and divination, often conflicted with Arab religious and cultural norms. The translator's choices were therefore guided by the CSI's type, degree of foreignness, and communicative function, navigating between source-oriented strategies to maintain authenticity and target-oriented strategies to enhance accessibility.

In addition, integrating Nida's (1964) equivalence theory provides an additional lens for understanding these decisions. Formal equivalence corresponds with source-oriented strategies and foreignization, emphasizing fidelity to the source text, while dynamic equivalence aligns with target-oriented strategies and domestication, prioritizing natural, culturally intelligible expression in the target language. Together, these frameworks illustrate that successful translation of CSIs involves strategic negotiation between cultural preservation and communicative clarity.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the translation of *Death and the King's Horseman* required a continuous balancing act: preserving Yoruba cultural identity while ensuring the text's readability and acceptability for Arab audiences. The translator's dual orientation, employing both source- and target-oriented procedures, was shaped by cultural and ideological considerations, ultimately influencing the adequacy and acceptability of CSIs and highlighting the translator's pivotal role as a mediator of cross-cultural meaning.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the translation of culture-specific items (CSIs) from African-English into Arabic in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, emphasizing the complex interplay between linguistic fidelity and cultural negotiation. The findings demonstrate that ecological, material, social, religious, and linguistic CSIs posed significant challenges for the translator due to their deep embedding in Yoruba cultural, ritualistic, and cosmological frameworks, as well as the absence of direct equivalents in Arabic. While domestication strategies, such as modulation, equivalence, adaptation, and transposition, facilitated fluency and comprehension for Arab readers, they often led to a partial loss of cultural depth, symbolic meaning, and the nuanced social and spiritual dimensions of the original text. Conversely, source-oriented foreignization strategies, including borrowing, calque, and literal translation, successfully preserved cultural specificity and the foreignness of the source text, yet sometimes rendered the text less accessible to readers unfamiliar with African traditions. The study highlights that relying exclusively on either approach is insufficient; a

more effective strategy involves a balanced, hybrid methodology that combines foreignization with explanatory devices, such as glosses, footnotes, or descriptive equivalence, to retain cultural authenticity while maintaining readability and interpretive clarity. By applying and integrating Nida's (1964) equivalence theory and culture categories, Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) translation procedures, and Venuti's (1995) domestication/foreignization model, the study presents a comprehensive analytical framework for evaluating CSI translation across culturally distant contexts. This research not only provides a detailed case study of an Anglophone African play translated into Arabic but also illuminates the translator's role as a cultural mediator navigating ideological, linguistic, and social asymmetries. Ultimately, the study underscores that translation is both a linguistic and cultural negotiation, advocating for heightened cultural sensitivity, theoretical flexibility, and methodological innovation in the translation of African postcolonial literature. It contributes to scholarly debates in translation studies, postcolonial literature, and intercultural communication, while offering practical insights and guidelines for translators, educators, and policymakers seeking to bridge significant cultural and linguistic gaps.

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