Translating Cultural Capital: Orhan Pamuk's *Istanbul* in Romanian

Roxana BÎRSANU
Romanian-American University, Bucharest

Abstract: *In the era of intense intercultural exchanges, literary translation is no longer seen as mere linguistic transfer, but, equally importantly, as a means to erect bridges between two distinct cultures. Great emphasis is placed thus on the translator's role as an agent who helps spread the cultural capital of a given community/society beyond the confines of its own borders. This paper revolves around the Romanian translation of Orhan Pamuk's autobiographic novel* Istanbul: Amintirile și orașul. *Relying on the principles of the cultural turn in translation studies, the analysis aims to look into how the Turkish cultural capital represented by Pamuk's novel is rendered into Romanian. On the one hand, consideration is given to the "exoticism" involved in this particular instance of cultural transfer, but also on issues such as stereotyping and the construction of the Self-Other referential framework; on the other hand, we will apply Lawrence Venuti's foreignisation / domestication dichotomy to investigate the procedures used for the translation of culture-specific references from Turkish into Romanian, with a view to identifying whether the translator imprinted a domesticating or a foreignising orientation to the target text.*

Keywords: *cultural capital, Turkish culture, translating strategies, foreignisation, translator visibility*

I. Introduction

Intercultural exchanges are now, in the era of easily accessible interaction, more fervent than ever. Due to the fact that people are constantly exposed to new cultural experiences, with challenges which are both difficult and exciting, we witness an increased interest in the various forms in which cultures express their specificity. Cultural artefacts – both material and spiritual – travel the world faster and bring people closer than ever as they open horizons and an appetite for further knowledge of the world's cultural diversity.

The literature of a culture is such an example of cultural artefact. Obviously, since there is no universal language and the international survival of literary products is mainly possible if they reach as wide a readership as possible, the best means to have them known to other cultures is through translation. An endeavour as old as human civilisation, translation has been one of the most efficient vehicles for the transfer and transmission of knowledge across boundaries of time and space alike. Because this is precisely what translation is meant to achieve, since *transducere* stands for the translator's attempt to carry meaning from one place to another, from one culture to another. It is the process through which a community/country/region ensures the circulation of its cultural capital and makes it known to the rest of the world. Translation is the transfer vehicle with potentially

BDD-A31693 © 2019 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 22:00:01 UTC)

the highest rate of success in spreading a certain literature worldwide, but also the most influential, since "it is able to project the image of an author and/or a (series of) work(s) in another culture, lifting that author and/or those works beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin" (Lefevere 9). The role of the translation is all the more important since, nowadays at least, readers are more exposed to literary experiences in translation rather than in their own native tongues; not to mention the tremendous impact translations have on the literature of the target culture.

The focus of this paper is the Romanian translation of Orhan Pamuk's autobiographic novel *Istanbul: Amintirile și orașul*, approached from two viewpoints. One tackles the dialogue between the two cultures interacting through translation and their positioning on the Self-Other axis. The other analyses the strategies used for the translation of culture-specific items.

II. Methodology and macrolevel considerations

Whenever translations are being discussed, there is a series of questions that should be addressed that are connected to the macrolevel analysis of the translation process/product. Such questions refer to *who* translates, *why*, *when* and *for whom*. The answers to these questions create the framework for a more in-depth investigation of the translation product, while also possibly clarifying the internal mechanisms of the translation process.

As already mentioned above, the focus of this research is the Nobel laureate's autobiographical novel, *Istanbul*, published in Turkish in 2003 by Yapı Credi Publishing House. It was translated into Romanian in 2011, when, as we shall see below, the name of the Turkish writer was already well-known to the Romanian readership. The memoirs are a masterful blend of verbal and visual imagery reflecting both on the person and on the city inextricably linked to the man's destiny. Istanbul is both the framework and a decisive factor in the construction of the novelist's identity; it goes beyond the confines of mere topographic considerations, to embody a point where cultural and personal identities overlap. In his review for *The New York Times*, "Istanbul: A Walker in the City", Christopher de Bellaigue perfectly grasps the main antagonist relationship that defines this autobiographic narrative – past and present, more precisely the memory of a once glorious empire and the present of the Republic:

> The past is represented by the Ottoman Empire, a vast many-limbed polyglot whose heart once beat in Istanbul, its dazzling capital. But the empire no longer exists, and its surviving memorials […] are being devoured by developers, fire and neglect. The present is the Turkish Republic, Ataturk's secular, Western-oriented, homogenizing nation state. (Bellaigue n.p.)

BDD-A31693 © 2019 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 22:00:01 UTC)

In the analysis of Pamuk's translated text into Romanian, we will resort to the tenets put forth by Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere, the theorists of the Cultural Turn in translation studies, and to the work of American researcher Lawrence Venuti. The main purpose is to approach the translated text as the interface for the contact between two distinct cultures, Romanian and Turkish. The microtext analysis does not centre on rhetorical mechanisms, structures of discourse or genre-related conventions; it rather strives to look into how the lexical level in terms of references to norms, institutions, food and traditions assists in creating the image of a given culture, in this particular case, the Turkish one.

Towards the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, the field of Translation Studies underwent a major change in the meaning of the process and role of translations. The main drivers of these changes were Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere, who considered that a change of emphasis was needed in Translation Studies. The unit of translation, as they proposed it, was no longer the word or the sentence, but culture, since both target and source texts are embedded in a certain cultural context, which is just as important as the linguistic systems. The main argument is that translations never appear in a vacuum and that, when doing their job, translators are subject to numerous constraints which are cultural as much as they are linguistic. Furthermore, the two theorists expanded the framework of reference in the analysis of a translated text to include extratextual considerations as well, such as who translates (agents of text production in the target language), for whom (readership analysis), who is the translation commissioned by and to which end (patronage), and which are the literary conventions and norms applying at the time of translation production (poetics) in the target system.

Given the weight of the complex cultural framework which impacts both the translation process and the reception of a translated text, Bassnett and Lefevere consider that "since languages express cultures, translators should be bicultural, not bilingual" (11). The cultural expertise that translators are to demonstrate through their work is of utmost relevance when they become the vehicles for the transmission of a society's cultural capital. The two translation scholars rely on the concept of "cultural capital" proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, who applied it in economy. They transplanted it to literary productions, to

> those texts which, whether their primary aim may have been to provide information, entertainment or a mixture of both, or to try to persuade, have become recognised as belonging to the "cultural capital" of a given culture. (Bassnett, Lefevere 41)

Obviously, the cultural capital of a community/society comprises those literary works that are recognised as valuable by the culture where they were produced and

BDD-A31693 © 2019 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 22:00:01 UTC)

whose circulation through translation aims to familiarise international consumers with the image of the culture thus represented.

The circulation of the cultural capital is prone to a series of variables:

> The distribution and regulation of cultural capital by means of translation, then, depends on at least the following three factors […]: (i) the need, or rather needs, of the audience, or rather audiences, (ii) the patron or initiator of the translation, and (iii) the relative prestige of the source and target cultures and their languages. (Bassnett, Lefevere 44)

The analysis of Pamuk's text translated into Romanian will also consider these factors, which account for the presence of this particular Turkish author on the Romanian literary scene.

In the case of Pamuk's novel, the translation fulfils a twofold role in the transfer of cultural capital. On the one hand, it is the translation of Pamuk's literary achievement, with its specific forms of artistic expression in terms of themes, leitmotifs and content, but also writing style and approach to the writing process. On the other hand, in *Istanbul*, the author endorses the capital of his own culture through the extremely complex and masterful depiction of this cultural space. Therefore, target language readers benefit doubly from reading this particular piece of writing: they come into contact with yet another of Pamuk's wonderfully written works and, through it, they access the rich history of a capital city, in all its complexity – cultural background, historical events that have shaped up the city as it stands today, family life, literature.

The extratextual context may explain to a certain degree why a particular author and/or work were selected for translation. One could probably claim that Orhan Pamuk is one of the best known (if not the best known) representatives of contemporary Turkish literature on the international literary scene. A writer by passion and profession (on the official Orhan Pamuk page there is an observation which informs readers that "Pamuk has been writing novels for 40 years and never done any other job except writing"), Pamuk has written over twenty novels; some of them have been translated so far into 63 languages. He was awarded numerous literary and cultural prizes all over the world (The Peace Price in Germany, Le Prix Médicis Étranger in France, the European Museum of the Year Award in Estonia, the Helena Vaz Da Silva European Award, and the Romanian Ovid Award, to mention but a few) which culminated with his being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2006, with the argument that "in the quest for the melancholic soul of his native city he has discovered new symbols for the clash and interlacing of cultures". He is the first Turkish writer to receive this prestigious award and the second youngest person in the history of Nobel prizes.

The first of Pamuk's novels translated into Romanian was *Numele meu este Roşu* (*Benim Adım Kırmızı* / *My Name Is Red*), published in 2006 at Curtea Veche

BDD-A31693 © 2019 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 22:00:01 UTC)

Publishing House. The fact that the 1998 novel was translated on the same year its author received the Nobel demonstrates that the Romanian literary system strives to be in sync with relevant cultural and literary events in the rest of Europe. It also suggests that the Romanian readership is interested in and connected to the most recent manifestations of literary creation. The strategy to provide a prompt translation of Pamuk's works into Romanian following this form of recognition of literary talent can be applied to several other Nobel awardees; to think only of recent years, Kazuo Ishiguro had already been translated into Romanian when he received the prize, but he was massively translated after 2017; the same could be said about Bob Dylan. Therefore, in Pamuk's case at least, the decision for the translation of his works was not triggered by the status of Romanian poetics as predominant in 2006 and later on (as indicated by Lefevere), but by the demands of a readership eager to have fast access to the Turkish novelist's work. This refers to the factor which, according to Bassnett and Lefevere, reflects the needs of the audience as a relevant contribution to the accurate distribution and reception of a society's cultural capital in a foreign culture.

This issue is closely linked to the second factor mentioned above, namely the patron or initiator of the translation. The status of the publishing houses where a text or an author appears in translation is another relevant element that may contribute to the reception of and wide access readers have to the translated work. Until now, Pamuk's works have appeared at two prestigious Romanian publishing houses, Curtea Veche and Polirom, respectively.

Finally, there is the factor which refers to the prestige of the source culture. The translation of Pamuk's works into Romanian reflects only secondarily an interest of Romanian readership in the culture which he represents. As mentioned above, these translations were foremost the result of the Romanian audience's need and desire to become familiar with the works of this Nobel laureate; therefore, in a way, one might claim that it was the fame of the author rather than the prestige of the culture that triggered this interest in translation. However, it is also true that Turkish literature has been accessible to Romanian readers since the twentieth century and even before, in a variety of literary genres, from fairy tales, to poems and contemporary poets and novelists. For instance, Vivaldi publishing house has an entire collection dedicated to Turkish literature, and the list contains well-known names such as poet Orhan Kemal or novelist Ahmet Hamdi Tapınar. The works of another Turkish novelist of international acclaim, Elif Shafak, have also been extensively translated into Romanian at Polirom, enjoying great success among Romanian readers.

In addition to the prestige of the author and the literary context in which he was translated into Romanian, Romanian readers are drawn towards Pamuk's works because he is the representative of a culture which ultimately fascinates them due to its status of being "exotic". Romanian-Turkish exchanges have been around for many centuries and have embraced many forms – historical, social,

BDD-A31693 © 2019 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 22:00:01 UTC)

economic and literary – not to mention the strong Turkish minority living in south-eastern Romania. The contact between the two cultures, therefore, has been consistent and manifold; and yet, Turkish culture has somehow preserved a certain mystery and fascination, a combination that always describes cultures which lie at the borderline between two worlds, in this particular case, between Europe and Orient. Its mystery derives from the fact that, despite a certain degree of the Romanians' familiarity with many aspects of its surface manifestation, there are others which are elusive and escape facile decoding, even when there is a seemingly common frame of cultural reference.

In the translation of so-called "exotic" literatures, the construction of the relationship Self-Other as a formula of cultural representation involves a certain level of difficulty:

> Beyond the dichotomy of estrangement versus familiarity, the investigation of the intricacies of cultural representation requires an eclectic approach. Self and Other are just the surface of many mechanisms at work in the act of reading a text. (Carbonell 43)

The "exotic" text is not only the arena where the Self-Other dialogue unfolds, but also a mirror which reflects the complex context and variables that govern this exchange, the background of cultural alterity.

But to what extent may one label a culture as "exotic"? According to which standards? Because of its (ab)use in the context of linguistic and cultural practices related to colonialism, the term has come to acquire a rather negative connotation. The terms of comparison when "exoticism" is involved are placed on clearly contradicting positions; something is exotic if it fails to comply with a familiar, already established set of rules, norms, habits, regulations; the wider the gap between the two interacting cultures, the more visible the "exoticism" that seems to describe one of them.

In *Istanbul*, whenever he uses the term, Pamuk always resorts to inverted commas, as a means to suggest that "exoticism" is a Western concept, a label attached by foreigners to his culture. Obviously, the city acquires its "exotic" dimension solely under the Western gaze. Pamuk grasps the very essence of this complicated cultural perspective when he claims that Western writers like Istanbul and the Turkish people because they have successfully preserved their "orientalism": "au reușit sa-și conserve aspectele 'exotice', orientale, care nu aduc cu cele occidentale" (Pamuk 340).

Much of the imagery that makes Turkey an "exotic" culture was already familiar to Romanian readers, albeit in connection rather with the Ottoman Empire, with the mores and customs of the pre-modern age. Therefore, what would be the expectations of Romanian readers from a text describing a city almost as large as a culture? How stereotypical would the premises be, based on which a Romanian

BDD-A31693 © 2019 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 22:00:01 UTC)

starts reading a book on Istanbul? Probably as stereotypical as the traditional image which is nothing but a reflection of touristic Istanbul: the harem, dervish places, the sultan, wooden houses and cemeteries (Pamuk 343).

Despite the stereotypical first approach, Romanian readers may find that Istanbul is full of surprises. One is that, before the cultural purification that was carried out after the instauration of the Republic, Istanbul was a multilingual city, where Turkish, Greek, Armenian, Italian, French and English were simultaneously heard on the streets of the city turned thus into a genuine "Babel tower" on the Bosphorus shores. Another surprising fact is the relaxed attitude towards religion practice. In the Christian world, Muslims are usually perceived as highly devoted to the religious practices of their cult. So it comes as a surprise that in the Pamuk household, religion was hardly ever a subject of spiritual concern:

> Peisajul spiritual al familiei era la fel de pustiu ca tristele maidane năpădite de ruine și ferigi" (260); "Câtă vreme am locuit în blocul acela, nu i-am văzut niciodată pe cei din familia mea să-și facă rugăciunea, să țină post ori să îngaime vreo rugăciune (259).

Although this approach to religious faith and practices is presented in the context of his extended family, Pamuk claims that it actually reflected the general attitude of the Turkish upper- and middle-class dominating the social scene in the sixties.

However, Pamuk depicts certain aspects of the Turkish culture in a manner which seems to provide some level of legitimacy to how Romanian stereotype Turkish people: their talent for commercially taking advantage of every situation, even local tragedies such as fires; interior designs stuffed with useless decorative items verging on kitsch; the patronising attitude of the *nouveaux riches* and their social insecurity; or financial bargaining – ticketing machines were installed in taxis to avoid situations such as "dă cât poți, frate" (201), "pay as much as you can, bro'." Some of these are extremely relatable for Romanian readers, since, to a certain degree, they are to be found in the Romanian culture as well. After all, in his *Craii de Curtea Veche*, Mateiu Caragiale claims that Romanians themselves are "at the gates of the Orient".

But Istanbul and the Istanbulites as representatives of the Turkish culture have been the subject of stereotyping since the previous centuries, when writers such as Nerval, Gautier or Gide visited the city and shared with their co-nationals their impressions which were mostly generated by the tourist side of Istanbul such as the sultan, the mosques, the situation of Turkish women and of the harem, the poverty of peripheral neighbourhoods. Obviously, the same stereotypes were also active in the Romanian perception of the Turkish culture and some of them survive even to this day, when Turkey continues to be seen as the land of an exotic Other, although the above-mentioned cultural references ceased to exist after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the proclamation of the Republic.

BDD-A31693 © 2019 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 22:00:01 UTC)

III. Culture-specific items (CSIs) in translation

No translation ever comes in a void; there is always a context for it, which consists of a number of elements. Every target culture where a translation is produced has a translation strategy, a domestic agenda, so to speak. As Belgian scholar Andre Lefevere claims,

> two factors basically determine the image of a work of literature as projected by a translation. These two factors are, in order of importance, the translator's ideology (whether s/he willingly embraces it, or whether it is imposed on him/her as a constraint by some form of patronage) and the poetics dominant in the receiving literature at the time the translation is made. (Lefevere 141)

In other words, the responsibility for the manner in which an author/piece of writing is received/generated in the target culture lies largely with the translator's agenda (in terms of both translation strategies and techniques and selection of the source texts to translate).

The translator's role is to be a mediator between two cultures, the person who not only opens the door to a whole fictional universe and to a new culture, but s/he is also a valuable guide, a torch bearer that lights the deeper meanings concealed in the source text:

> The translator stands at the centre of this dynamic process of communication, as a mediator between the producer of the SL text and whoever are its TL receivers. The translator is first and foremost a mediator between parties for whom mutual communication might otherwise be problematic. (Hatim, Mason 223)

Among others, the translator's role is also to signal the presence of the Other without placing it on antagonistic positions as to the Self, but in a way which emphasises the beauty and the need for dissimilarities and differences.

The part played by the translator now, in the (post)postmodern era, has changed significantly as compared to how it used to be considered in the past. The line between author and translator has become progressively blurred, and in the author–translator–reader triangle, the translator is assigned an increasingly important role. Although the dynamics of this triad is subject to debates having to do mostly with ethical considerations, there is another issue that is quite closely connected to it, i.e. the visibility/invisibility of the translator.

In Romania, Pamuk's voice and mediator between the Turkish writer and his Romanian readership has been Professor Luminiţa Munteanu, a reputed specialist in oriental studies. From the onset, she assumed the role of a visible translator, when she chose to accompany her translations with a rich body of

BDD-A31693 © 2019 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 22:00:01 UTC)

paratexts such as glossaries, prefaces, but also through the strategies she employed in her translations. The issue of the translator's visibility/invisibility was launched in Translation Studies by Lawrence Venuti. According to him, the strategies and techniques translators opt for and their general approach to the source text direct the target towards domestication or foreignisation.

In Venuti's framework, a translation with a domesticating orientation attempts "to bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, the familiar"; it is "a labor of acculturation which domesticates the foreign text, making it intelligible and even familiar to the target-language reader, providing him or her with the narcissistic experience of recognising his or her cultural other" ("Introduction", 5). On the other hand, when a translation strives to achieve foreignising accents, it "signifies the foreignness of the foreign text by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language. In its efforts to do right abroad, this translation method must do wrong at home" (*Translator's Invisibility*, 18-20). Adopting strictly either of the two extremes would be detrimental both to the source text/author selected for translation and to the purpose of the translation activity itself.

To a significant extent, a domesticating approach annuls considerably the specificity of the source text in respect of content and stylistic expression, which may be precisely the reason why the given text was selected for translation. At the same times, it deprives the target readership of the opportunity to expand their cultural horizon. A completely foreignising translation, on the other hand, has the potential to frustrate readers, who are thus faced with a foreign text which they may feel alien with respect to content, discursive patterns or communicative practices. This difficulty in deciphering the text – a task which they have to perform with no assistance from the translator – may push them farther away from the text, the inevitable outcome being a poor reception of the source text/culture in the target system.

It is a known fact that each community/culture has its own set of symbols, habits and systems by means of which it encodes reality. Depending on the breadth of the intercultural gap between the two systems interacting through the process of translation, the systems for reality encryption may overlap or may diverge to a significant extent. We have already established that the translation of Pamuk's *Istanbul* places Romanian readers face to face with what might be deemed an "exotic" culture. The "translation from stereotypically 'exotic' cultures which are a paradigm of the Other are supposed already to be foreignising" (Carbonell 46). Therefore, at content level at least, in the first instance readers should prepare for a foreignising reading experience. The translation strategies and mechanisms that the translator resorts to in the rendition of the text into Romanian may bridge the above-mentioned cultural gap or deepen it.

BDD-A31693 © 2019 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 22:00:01 UTC)

The main challenge the translator is faced with, especially in a highly culturally marked text such as *Istanbul*, resides in the decision for the treatment of culture-specific items (CSI). According to Aixela,

> there is a common tendency to identify CSIs with those items especially linked to the most arbitrary area of such linguistic system – its local institutions, streets, historical figures, place names, personal names, periodicals, works of art, etc. – which will normally present a translation problem in other languages. (57)

The manner in which CSIs are handled in translation depends basically on two factors: the personal decision of the translator, his/her agenda which favours either domestication or foreignisation (materialised in the corresponding translation strategies applied to the text) and the translation norms and conventions existing in the target language, to which the translator may or may not choose to adhere.

The difficulty in translating CSIs mainly derives from the inexistence of or a distinct value assigned to a source text linguistic item or a concrete object referent in the target culture. *Istanbul* abounds in such cultural references, from gastronomic terms to institutions, publications and names of persons. In most situations, the translator opted for the path of the visible translator, since she provided the target text with footnotes which explain the numerous cultural references present in the text. In the treatment of CSIs, there are two main translation strategies: conservation – with a clear foreignising orientation, and substitution, which guides the text towards domestication or naturalisation. The Romanian rendition of Turkish CSIs displays the adoption of conservation both for proper names and for common nouns.

According to Theo Hermans, there are broadly two categories of proper names: conventional (seen as arbitrary and unmotivated) and loaded (which acquired or were assigned various historical or cultural values relevant in the source culture/literature) (12). In *Istanbul*, proper names fall into the former category and designate institutions, cultural, historical and literary figures, and periodicals. In the case of periodicals, the translator opted for the strategy of repetition, which is simply the transcription of the source language name, but she also provided their Romanian translation in the footnotes: *Tasvir-i Efkâr* (Descrierea ideilor), *Saadet* (Fericirea), *Hayat* (Viața) or *Hüriyet* (Libertatea). Toponyms were approached with the same translation strategy, namely repetition accompanied by target language translation in the footnotes: "Istiklal Caddesi" (Bulevardul Independenței) or "strada Yeșilçam" (Bradul verde), as is the case with institution names: "Liceul Ișik" (Lumina), "cafeneaua Çinaralti" (Sub platani) or "Liceul de Fete Akșam" (Seara).

The names of persons are repeated in the target text, but with a massive contribution from the translator, who accompanied such references with vast

BDD-A31693 © 2019 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 22:00:01 UTC)

footnotes explaining their status and importance in the source culture. Here are some examples: Al-Kindi, Ibn Sina (unrecognisable to most Western readers in the absence of further explanations, since he is mostly known as Avicenna), Mawlana or Adnan Menderes. It is also with the help of a footnote that we find out that Pamuk actually means "cotton" in Turkish. There is a series of proper names for which biographic explanations are omitted, as they are provided in the body of the text by the author himself; novelist Ahmet Hamdi Tapınar, historian Reșat Ekrem Koçu and novelist Ahmet Rașim are such examples.

In the case of common names, the translator decided to combine distinct translation procedures. Repetition is again the most frequently used translation strategy, combined with graphical signalling (CSIs are italicised whenever they occur in the target text) and extratextual gloss – further explanations for and associations triggered by the use of the respective CSIs which may escape accurate understanding were it not for such additional information. There are, for instance, numerous names of political and administrative positions from the time of the Ottoman Empire such as "sadrazam", "șahzadea", "viziri", "pașale" or "valiu". Although they are specific to the source culture and do not have a correspondent in the reality of the target one, they are not graphically marked as foreign due to the fact that they do have a linguistic correspondent in the target language. Moreover, the translator probably assumed that these historical references are familiar to the Romanian readership as a result of the intense contacts between the two cultures in the medieval period. The only noun designating an administrative position which is graphically emphasised is *kaymakam*, which is also explained in detail in a footnote.

Other CSIs are merely transplanted in the target text with a clear graphical indication of their foreignness; the translator mainly resorted to this strategy because there is no equivalent referent in the target culture for the concepts/items designated by the source culture specific terms: abstract notions, e.g. "poeți *divani*", "*iftar*", "*șehrengiz*", "*daeva*", "*karagöz*", or traditional food such as "*kokoreç*" or "*muhallebi*" (all of them being explained in footnotes). There are two references, "*kurender*" and "*kebap*", which, although marked as foreign, are not accompanied by explanations, most likely since the meaning of the former can be easily inferred from the context and from the facile homophonic association with the Romanian word "curent", while the latter represents a dish with which Romanians are already very familiar. When the translator chose to italicise the foreign terms, she actually complied with the convention generally applied for the rendition of foreign concepts with no linguistic and/or cultural correspondent in the Romanian language/culture.

In the category of abstract concepts which seem to be untranslatable a special part is held by *hüzün*, which Pamuk places in the semantic field of the English "melancholy" and the French "tristesse", but he makes a clear distinction between them and the Turkish concept. The writer dedicates an entire chapter to

BDD-A31693 © 2019 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 22:00:01 UTC)

this concept, namely Chapter 10 entitled *Hüzün – melankoli – tristesse*, in which he explains in detail the tribulations and evolutions of the term across cultures and literatures. The entire book is under the sign of "hüzün", which actually becomes a character in its own right next to the author himself and the city of Istanbul.

Due to its ineffable nature that cannot be fully grasped in translation, "hüzün" transgresses linguistic and/or cultural barriers; this is precisely the reason why it is repeated as such in the Romanian translation. In her insightful research, "Orhan Pamuk's *Hüzün* in English and French", Ayșe Ece discusses the treatment of this term in the English and French versions, which is similar to the one in the Romanian variant. All the above-mentioned translators opted for conservation, since they grasped the utmost significance the term has in the overall economy of the text. "The textual centrality of a CSI will usually be a force that pushes the translator to give the biggest possible degree of conservation" (Aixela 70), an idea which is best illustrated by the treatment of "hüzün", which is not even once substituted in the target text by a tentative synonym.

There is another category of references present in *Istanbul* which are not necessarily marked as culture-specific, but which the translator opted to gloss on in order to assist target readers in better understanding and accessing the cultural universe of the source text. These refer to explanations for concepts such as "sufism", "Sărbătoarea Dulciurilor" and "Sărbătoarea Jertfei". They are not particularly specific to the Turkish culture, but are common to communities or cultures with shared values, habits and customs such as religious practices.

The analysis of the CSIs and the translation strategies identified in their treatment suggest the position of the translator in relation to the translated text. Aixela claims that the decisions a translator makes are subject to several variables, among which the supratextual parameter (the extent of language prescriptivism, the structure and expectations of target readers, the category of initiators or the translator's training and social status) and the textual parameter (which consists of concrete textual constraints, the existence of previous translations and canonisation) (65-67). The translation procedures and strategies adopted by the Romanian translator of *Istanbul* reveal a conscious and laborious attempt to strike a balance between foreignisation (or exoticisation) and domestication (or naturalisation). Professor Munteanu chose to clearly mark the foreignness of the target text (actually, it would have been a terrible loss for Romanian readers had she opted differently), which demonstrates her interest in and respect for the cultural specificity of the source text. At the same time, she demonstrates a concern to educate the target readers, whose comprehension and reception of the text she facilitates through the highly informed and detailed extratextual glosses.

Conclusions

The translation of a representative of the cultural capital belonging to a given community/society is always a cultural and literary event of great significance, as it

BDD-A31693 © 2019 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 22:00:01 UTC)

ensures the erection of further bridges across cultural spaces. Such a cultural event is the translation of Pamuk's works into Romanian, among which *Istanbul* is perhaps the one that takes the Romanian readership closer than ever to the genuine Turkish soul and experience. Apart from being an X-ray of the author's early years and of the city life with its intricate web of splendours and misery, and despite (or maybe due to) the *hüzün* that seems to permeate the depiction of the Turkish capital, Pamuk's text is also the most compelling reason to (re)visit Istanbul. Without the shadow of a doubt, this time the visit will be differently filtered and experienced.

The Romanian translation of *Istanbul* is a twofold success. On the one hand, it renders into Romanian yet another work of the Tuskish Nobel laureate who is highly appreciated in Romania. On the other hand, this book in particular, while going beyond inevitable cultural stereotypes, opens new and surprising perspectives on a culture which, although familiar to Romanians for centuries, has maintained its fascination and mysterious allure.

The message of the book benefited the professional assistance of the translator whose reading of the source text (because translators are readers, first of all) reflects the intention of the author. So it is that the translation procedures and strategies which are visible at text level render accurately the purpose of the original text: that of depicting a cultural experience, emphasising the beauty and strangeness of its foreignness while relying on associations which are already familiar to the target readership.

Works Cited

Aixelá, Javier Franco. "Culture-specific Items in Translation". *Translation, Power, Subversion*. Ed. Roman Álvarez, M. Carmen-África Vidal Claramonte. Clevedon & Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters, 1996. 52-79.

Bassnett, Susan, Andre Lefevere. "Introduction: Proust's Grandmother and the Thousand and One Nights: The 'Cultural Turn' in Translation Studies". *Translation, History and Culture*. Eds. Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere. London & New York: Pinter, 1990. 1-14.

Bellaigue, Christopher de. "*Istanbul*: A Walker in the City". *New York Times*, June 12, 2005. Retrieved at <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/12/books/review/istanbul-a-walker-in-the-city.html>.

Carbonell, Ovidi. "Misquoted Others: Locating Newness and Authority in Cultural Translation". *Translating Others*. Vol. 1. Ed. Theo Hermans. Manchester: St. Jerome, 2006. 43-63.

Ece, Ayșe. "Orhan Pamuk's *Hüzün* in English and French". *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 18.4 (2010): 297-306.

BDD-A31693 © 2019 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 22:00:01 UTC)

Hatim, Basil, Ian Mason. *Discourse and the Translator*. London: Longman, 1990.
Hermans, Theo. "On Translating Proper Names, with Reference to De Witte and Max Havellaar". *Modern Dutch Studies*. Ed. Michael Wintle. London: Athlone, 1988. 11-24.
Lefevere, Andre. *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame.* London & New York: Routledge. 1992.
Pamuk, Orhan. *Istanbul. Amintirile și orașul*. Trans. Luminița Munteanu. Iași: Polirom, 2017.
---. Orhan Pamuk official website. <https://www.orhanpamuk.net/>.
Venuti, Lawrence. "Introduction". *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. London: Routledge, 1992. 1-9.
---. *The Translator's Invisibility.* London: Routledge, 1995.

BDD-A31693 © 2019 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-18 22:00:01 UTC)