



Translation of Culture-Specific References in *Asterix* Animated Films Dubbed into Sinhala

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ABSTRACT

Culture-specific references (CSR) in audiovisual texts are countless. Their identification, classification as well as translation pose numerous challenges to translators and scholars. The objective of the study is to identify the strategies used to translate them in audiovisual texts and to examine the effect created by the choices of the translators. Three *Asterix* animated films and their Sinhala dubbed versions are chosen: *Asterix in Britain* (1986), *Asterix Conquers America* (1994) and *Asterix and Cleopatra* (1968). Peter Newmark's classification (1988) is employed to select the CSRs. To identify and analyse the translation strategies used in the dubbed film, the taxonomy proposed by Tomaszekiewicz (1993) is applied. A sample of fifty examples is selected and then compared with the solutions provided by the translators. The findings indicate that the dubbed version is overwhelmingly domesticated with strategies such as omission, adaptation, generalization and equivalence being used frequently. Foreignization strategies such as borrowing was employed only once. The domestication strategies bring the dubbed versions closer to the target audience, popularizing it in the target language. At the same time, the dubbed audiovisual texts are simplified making them easier to understand to a young audience.

Keywords: Audiovisual, culture, domestication, foreignization, strategies

Introduction

Translating culture is unavoidable in literary and audiovisual texts. Be it animated or live-action films, culture is present in both audio and visual channels making the task of the translators ever more demanding. Translating cultural elements is a thorny area which draws the attention of researchers from around the world, working on a variety of languages.

Culture-specific references can be countless. As Aixelá points out “everything is culturally produced, including the language” (1996, p. 57). Therefore, their definition and identification pose numerous challenges to researchers. These references are known by different terms: “culture specific,” ‘culture bound references/elements/terms/items/expressions’, ‘*realia*’, ‘allusions’ or, more generally, ‘cultural references’ (Ranzato, 2016, p. 53). Pedersen, using the term Extralinguistic cultural references (ECR) to identify them and define them as “as



reference that is attempted by means of any cultural linguistic expression, which refers to an extralinguistic entity or process” (2011, p. 43). Chiaro, focusing on both dubbing and subtitling, and referring to the visual as well, mentions them as entities belonging to one particular culture “exclusively verbal or both verbal and visual in nature” (2009, p. 156). In the present study, they are mentioned as culture-specific references (CSR) stressing on their association with a particular culture.

As suggested by these definitions, every aspect that is associated with culture and language can be cited as CSRs. Further, the audience’s ability to understand the CSRs is a concern for the translators. Depending on the education and social backgrounds or even due to generation gaps, certain members of the audience would understand a particular term easily while another speaking the same language and living in the same community may not (Ranzato, 2016, p.54). Pointing to another problematic aspect which is the identification of the CSRs, Newmark explains that these terms can be easily detected and they cannot be literally translated; there are many cultural terms that are described in ordinary language (1988, p. 95). According to him, such terms, if translated literally, may distort the meaning.

To group the limitless number of CSRs, different classifications were proposed by scholars. Adapted from Nida, Newmark (1988) proposed a classification comprising five broad categories: Ecology, Material culture, Social culture, Organisations (and customs, activities, procedure, concepts), Gestures and habits (p.95). Though often quoted in research, the classification was criticised for its rigidity and lack of contextualisation (Ranzato, 2016, p. 59).

Días Cintas’s and Remael’s (2007) classification includes three broad categories: Geographical references, Ethnographical references, and Socio-Political references which are divided into sub categories. When grouping the CSRs according to these categories, very often they overlap. Commenting on his own classification, Pedersen states that “My own list also contains many overlapping domains, especially between the proper names domain and some of the others, like government and education” (2011, p. 60). However, he highlights its usefulness in facilitating research.

To translate the CSRs, researchers have introduced numerous taxonomies over the years. From the strategies proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet in *Stylistique comparé du français et de l’anglais* (1958) to Días Cintas and Remael in 2007, there have been many taxonomies contributing to facilitate the translation of the CSRs. Pedersen (2011) highlights the “general trend” in these taxonomies is as “arranging the strategies along an axis of source text and the target” (p,71). The names given to the two extreme ends of the axis vary: foreignization and domestication (Venuti 1995), Adequate and Acceptable (Tourey, 1995) and Formal and Dynamic (Nida, 1964) are but a few examples (p.71). In the present study, the terms proposed by Venuti are cited and the strategies proposed by Tomaszkiwicz (1993) are applied.

Gottlieb, interestingly points out the three major concerns when analysing data in a study on translating the CSRs (2009, p.32):

- categories are established to accommodate findings,
- different categories reflect significant differences in one's findings,
- the number of categories reflect the number of findings: a small set of data does not tally with a great number of categories.

The number of categories varies in each of the taxonomies: Pedersen (2005) – seven categories, Leppihelm (2001, 2011) – seven categories, Días Cintas and Remael (2007) – nine categories, and Ranzato (2011) – eleven categories. For example, Ranzato revises the Días Cintas's and Remael's taxonomy and proposes the following to analyse the case studies in her research: Loan, Official Translation, Calque, Explicitation, Generalisation by hypernym, Concretisation by hyponym, Substitution, Lexical Recreation, Compensation, Elimination, and Creative Addition (2016, p. 83-84). For the current study, in which the set of data is small, limited to three films, the choice of eight categories in Tomaszekiewicz (1993) can be justified.

Though studies are frequently carried out to examine and analyse the different aspects of the translation of the CSRs, studies based on the dubbing of the audiovisual texts are not very numerous. Certain studies compare the strategies used in a subtitled version and a dubbed version. Examining the subtitling and dubbing of the CSRs in three English feature film into French, Pettit (2009) highlights different ways the source culture infiltrates the subtitles and the dubbing.

Audio and visual cultural signs are an integral part of the audiovisual message. The source culture infiltrates the subtitled version through the image and the soundtrack. In the case of the dubbed version this process takes place normally through the image but also through the translations when terms from the source culture are borrowed. (p.54)

Commenting on the individual strategies, Omission of the CSRs for example, Pettit notes that while it reduces the text in the subtitles, in dubbing, it allows to simplify the dialogs making them general, neutralized and less expressive. She observes that certain strategies were chosen because of the need for text reduction in the text in the subtitled version and lip synchronizing in the dubbed version (p.54). However, in the present study, owing to the fact that the corpus consists of three animated films, lip synchronizing was not taken into consideration as an important factor that influences the choice of the translation strategy. Bruti (2014) argues that with cartoons, synchronisation is less crucial as “as the protagonists are often talking animals, so speech and articulating movements do not need to coincide so accurately as they do in feature films, because place and manner of articulation are blurred and approximate” (p. 92).

Research on the CSRs observes that in some dubbed audiovisual texts, the translators favour a domestication approach. Speaking of the Polish dubbed version of the popular animated film *Shrek*, Bogucki (2016) states that the translator Bartosz Wierzbica heavily domesticated to make it easier for the target language (TL) audience. It contains many references to Polish culture such as “the Muffin Man” replaced by Muchomoreck, a character from Czechoslovakian cartoon and “awful cheese” replaced by a type of cheese available in Poland. Criticizing the domestication approach not just in audiovisual texts, but in all modalities, he states domestication can only be “justifiable in cases where the remaining elements of the filmic message (...) do not contain any

cultural references, or ideally in movies set in imaginary worlds: fairy tales, sci-fi or fantasy films, etc.” (p.47). He further states that “whenever the dialogue coincides with a visual depiction of a culture-bound element, a domesticated translation constitutes a clash” (p.47).

Ramière (2006) in her study on the dubbing and subtitling of three French films into English, raises concerns on where to place strategies on the foreignization/domestication spectrum. For example, she questions whether a strategy such as Omission is a form of foreignization or domestication (p. 158). The quantitative analysis of the results concludes “the whole repertoire of translation procedures is used in the three films, making it therefore impossible to demonstrate any form of consistency as far as foreignizing or domesticating norms are concerned” (p. 159). The study further suggests that therefore, it is difficult to decide on the impact made by the translation strategies.

Analysing the translation of the CSRs in dubbed audiovisual texts seems a topic preferred by the researchers working on audiovisual translation. These researches highlight the application of different translation strategies used by the translators and discover various challenges that they face working in their own language and for their own target audience. It is important to acknowledge the contributions of these studies because they add new knowledge and the translators and scholars alike around the world can benefit from them making advances in the field. The present study expects to contribute to the existing knowledge by analysing the translation of the CSRs into Sinhala, which is a minority language spoken only in the TL country. *Asterix* being internationally well-known and translated into multiple languages, studies are already conducted on various aspects such as the proper names and the wordplay. However, studies on the CSRs, based uniquely on the *Asterix* animated films are not widely available which increases the significance of the current study. The current research targets to fill this gap. The research question that the study investigates is what are the strategies employed by the translators when transferring the CSRs into Sinhala in dubbed audiovisual texts and what is the impact created by their choices.

Methods

From the Sinhala dubbed *Asterix* films that were broadcasted in the country, the following three were chosen because they were dubbed by the same team and released between 2002-2003 as half-an-hour episodes on Sirasa TV (Jayawardena & Rodrigo, 2022): *Asterix in Britain* (1986), *Asterix Conquers America* (1994) and *Asterix and Cleopatra* (1968). Further, this series is chosen owing to the phenomenal success that the Sinhala dubbed films received since they were first aired. They were broadcasted repeatedly over the years, taking into consideration the popular demand. These three films were chosen also due to the fact that, in them, the Gauls travel to other countries. Therefore, the films could contain additional CSRs belonging to regions other than Gaul and Rome.

To collect the CSRs for the study, Newmark’s (1988) classification was considered. CSRs that belong to the five main categories are selected for the study. They include references to food, customs and habits, sports, historical figures and events. To analyse how the CSRs in the Sinhala dubbed *Asterix* films are translated, the strategies proposed by Tomaszkiwicz (1993) are applied.

1. Omission
2. Literal translation
3. Borrowing
4. Equivalence
5. Adaptation
6. Replacement
7. Generalisation
8. Explication

The proposed eight strategies were originally set to study the translation of culture-specific terms in film subtitling (Pettit, 2009, p. 45). However, as Pettit points out “it is also possible to use them to describe the processes which occur in dubbed versions” (p.45). By applying the strategies, it would be possible first, to identify which were used by the translators and then, to note the frequency in which they were used. The analysis of the results would reveal the overall effect created by the choices made by the translators.

The Sinhala dubbed films were made from the English dubbed films making English the relay language (RL). Therefore, the study does not refer to the original French films limiting only to the English and Sinhala dubbed versions. The chosen RL films were watched repeatedly to identify the culture-specific references. Fifty examples were singled out and their translations were examined in the TL films. In one example, it is possible to note that more than one strategy is applied simultaneously. However, when considering the frequency, only the dominant strategy is taken into account.

Results

The results obtained from examining the CSRs in the RL and their translation in the TL films are presented in Table 1.

Translation strategy	Frequency
Omission	21
Literal Translation	02
Borrowing	01
Equivalence	04
Adaptation	14
Replacement	00
Generalisation	07
Explication	01
	50

In the detailed analysis of the results, the seven strategies identified in the audiovisual texts are discussed with relevant examples. Though fifty examples were analysed in detail in the study, only the most pertinent examples are given below. Among the strategies identified, Omission stands out as the strategy that is employed the highest number of times. It is followed by Adaptation and Generalisation. A single example was not found for the strategy, Replacement.

In each example, first the CSR in the RL is given in the table, then the transliteration of the TL solution. The back translation into English can be seen in the third column.

1. Omission

Omission was used twenty-one (21) times making it the most frequently used strategy in the three films to translate the CSRs. As the number of examples are high, they are divided into sub categories to show the variety of references eliminated in the films. As the name of the strategy indicates, all these CSRs are omitted from the TL dubbed film.

Food

Two separate references from *Asterix in Britain* and *Asterix Conquers America* are included in this example. In the first one from *Asterix in Britain*, Gaulix who is a Gaulish inn keeper in London explains to Asterix and Obelix, the types of specialties stored in the cellar. All the references in it, the food items, the cities and Ali Baba's cave are eliminated by the translators. In the TL, Gaulix only explains that food is in abundance and kept well arranged in the cellar. The variety of exotic Gaulish delicacies that are highlighted in the RL are completely removed, without giving any information about them to the TL audience. However, the target audience is able to see his stock on the screen but, they are unable to identify them separately. The image compensates to a certain extent the CSRs that were removed from the dialogs.

The second example is taken from *Asterix Conquers America*. In this particular scene, the Red Indian girl orders a roasted meat dish to cure Obelix's amnesia. When the food arrives on a tray, Asterix calls it an "Indian takeaway", playing the word "Indian" and referring to a takeaway from an Indian restaurant. This too is eliminated in the TL, removing the cultural reference, as well as the wordplay from the dialog.

RL	TL	Back translation into English ¹
Gaulix: I got genuine delicacies imported from Gaul. Wait till you see what I got. This is Ali Baba's cave. All fresh merchandise. Sausages from Nice and Lyon, good smoked ham from Bayonne. Take a whiff. It's a breath from home.	Gaulix: "Biima vitrak neme kemath thiyanna. Oya balanna yata okkoma dala thiyenne kema thamayi. Masa ganakata hari kanna kema thiyanna, baya venna nethuva ethulata wela kaka inna thiyenne. Mama pilivelata thiyala thiyenne. Arava methana, mewa methana, eva kisi petalillak ne, kanna puluvan ona tharam. Kohomada rasa nahara pinna yana suvandha."	I have not just drinks, but food too. See below, all food items. You can eat for months. Without any problem, you can stay inside and eat. I arranged all of them. Those things there, these things here. No confusions. You can eat as much you as want. See, how satisfying the smell is.
Asterix: "Wow. An Indian Takeaway!"	Asterix: "Aah dekkada neda scene eka?"	Ah did you see the scene?

Food habits

The second set of examples draw attention to the strange food habits that the Gauls encounter during their travels, particularly in *Asterix in Britain*. References to boiled meat, mint sauce and warm beer are seen in these situations. General Motus threatens his soldiers with mint sauce and warm beer showing to what extent that these British food habits are despised by the Romans. Unfortunately, all the references made to these food items are eliminated in the TL. The target audience learns neither of these British food items nor the comments made by the Romans about them. The translators provide a normal conversation without any CSRs.

RL	TL	Back translation into English
General Motus: "I'll catch those guys; I'll boil them and throw them to the lions. I'll serve them with mint sauce...Yuk, those poor lions."	General Motus: "Mala perethayek wage balan inne nethuva yanava. Apoi, buru thadiyek."	Don't stare like a zombie. Go. Oh. A big idiot.
General Motus: Now you listen. You go and get those guys or I'll draw you in warm beer.	General Motus: "Ung penala yanakan uda balan idala enawa methana, Denna hithenava mata..."	You waited till they escape, now you come here. I feel like beating...

Sports

References to rowing are found in both *Asterix in Britain* and *Asterix Conquers America*. As seen in both these situations, it's a historical as well as a prestigious British sport that is associated with Oxford and Cambridge universities. In the first situation, the translators

¹ Translated into English by the researcher.

completely remove the reference to rowing. The conversation between Asterix and Anticlimax is replaced by the voice over who simply explains that the Gauls set off to England. In the second example, the translators eliminate the names of the two sides. Instead, the two teams are simply referred to as right-hand side and left-hand side. The importance of the British tradition and the British establishments is removed from these scenes in the TL.

RL	TL	Back translation into English
Asterix: “You really know how to row. Anticlimax: It’s nothing really. Pater rowed for Oxford and then later rowed for Cambridge.	Voice-over: “Arishta barel ekakuth patogena Jim pappayi, Soora pappayi, Peethrayi Engalantheta yanava.”	Soora pappa/Asterix, Jim pappa/Obelix and Peethara/Anticlimax are going to England with a barrel full of magic potion.
Lucullus: “Dear sportsmen! It’s time for the race. Will Oxfordia, sporting the dark blue bruises. . . .hold sway over Cambridgensia, with the light blue contusions? Shall we see?”	Lucullus: “Mallila, mama me ave oya degollangen vedima fit eka thiyenne katada kiyala hoyala balannayi. Den balamu kavuda dinanne kiyala. Mage bath kana atha peththe kattiyada anith atha peththe kattiyada kiyana ekayi.	Brothers, I came to see which team is the fittest among these two teams. Let’s see who will win. Those on the side of my rice eating hand or on the side of the other hand.

Landmarks

In these examples, important landmarks are mentioned in the RL such as Stonehenge in the UK in *Asterix and Cleopatra* and the Colosseum in Rome in *Asterix Conquers America* respectively. In the first situation, Asterix makes fun of Obelix, when he who is a menhir delivery man, is not impressed with the Pyramids. Stonehenge is a “prehistoric stone circle monument, cemetery and archaeological site” (Pearson, 2024). It contains stone structures similar in shape to a menhir which maybe the reason why Asterix mention it to ridicule Obelix’s obsession with the menhirs.

In the second situation, when the Roman centurion arrives in Rome, the audience can hear a description given by the voice-over of the historical city highlighting some of its valued treasures including the Colosseum. Unfortunately, in both these examples, the references to the landmarks are erased completely in the TL. The target audience doesn’t get to know about the historical importance of the ancient city of Rome and what it was known for. It is possible that the translators believed that this information was not necessary for the story mainly because they are not seen on-screen. Further, the monuments may not be familiar to the TL audience, specially to a young audience. Therefore, it would be difficult for them to understand the importance of the reference.

Table 5. Omission of landmarks		
RL	TL	Back translation into English
Obelix: “Pyramids, give me a menhir any day.” Asterix: “Can’t you forget Stonehenge.” (...) Obelix: “None of these would have happened in a menhir.”	Obelix: “Ochchara kiyanava nam mama innam.” Asterix: “Meyata hariyata tharaha yanavane” (...) Obelix: “Api udata giya nam iwarayne.”	If you insist, I’ll stay. He has a bad temper (...) We should have gone to the top.
Voice-over: “Rome, the most important city in the universe. Home of everything great about civilization. The Senate, the Colosseum... ..and those little pasta things shaped like shells.”	Voice-over: “Guti keva senpathiya Caesarva hoyagena melo sihiyak nethiva Rometa enava.”	The beaten centurion comes crazily to Rome looking for Caesar.

Historical events & people

Among CSRs, references to historical figures and events are also noted. For example, Olympic games and the Roman senator Brutus are mentioned in *Asterix Conquers America*. The strategy used by the TL translators is to eliminate them completely.

In the first situation, when the centurion falls into the sauna in front of Caesar and the senators, Caesar makes this particular comment about diving becoming an Olympic sporting event. In the second situation, one of the senators brings up the name of Brutus referring to him being a traitor which is historically accurate. Though the references belong to Greek and Roman cultures, they are recognized internationally, especially the Olympic games which are still held every four years. However, it is possible that a historical figure such as Brutus, a Roman politician from 44 BCE may not be that well known to the target audience. The translators do not provide substitutes in these situations, but decide to remove the references entirely from the conversation.

Table 6. Omission of historical events and people		
RL	TL	Back translation into English
Caesar to Centurion: “Now there’s an Olympic event that the Greeks never thought of... diving”.	Caesar to Centurion: “Mokada miniho? Mahaloku vedar vage roota gena evilla kohatada penne? E kiyamu”.	What is the matter man? You come here like a big champion. See where you jumped? Now, speak.
Senator: “Where’s that shirker, Brutus? He should take care of this sort of a job. He’ll stab you in the back”.	Senator: “Me eththatama e peththata enavanam egollo salli denavaluda? Ehenam gaha ganna ona ne, apith e peththata yang ane”.	Is it true that they give money if we jump to their side? There’s no point in fighting, let’s jump to the other side.

Gods

Romans, Gauls and Egyptians, they all swear by their beloved gods: Jupiter, Tutatis, Osiris, Belenus etc. References to them can be seen in almost all the *Asterix* films. The following examples are taken from *Asterix and Cleopatra* and *Asterix Conquers America*. The first situation captures some of the gods popularly known among the Romans, the Gauls and the Egyptians. Unfortunately, all the references to the gods are omitted in the TL. A normal conversation is presented to the audience as seen in the examples. The references indicate that each community has its specific gods and they ask for their blessing in critical situations. The names of the gods may sound fictional, yet, their role in the community is an important aspect that could have been preserved in the TL.

RL	TL	Back translation into English
Centurion: “We shall attack, by Jupiter. Asterix: We don’t want to fight by Tutatis.” (...) Centurion: “You’ll be sorry for this, by Mercury!” Edifice: “What are we going to do, by Osiris?” Asterix: “We build our fortifications, by Belenus!” Getafix: “You’re quite right, by Belisama!”	Centurion: “Apita sidda wenawa pahara denna. Ceasar kivva gahannama kiyala.” Asterix: “Apita boruwata yudda karanna ona ne. Hebeyi ona nam.” (...) Centurion: “Ehenam lesthi wenawa.” Edifice: “Den api mokada karanne? Kiyanna pappe.” Asterix: “Ape aarakshava thara kara ganna ona.” Getafix: “Eka hari. Api lasthi wemu.”	We’ll have to attack. Ceasar ordered to attack. We don’t want to fight, in vain, but if you want (...) Then get ready. What shall we do now? Tell druid. We must fortify our defences. That’s true. We’ll get ready.
Getafix: “Belenus bless the day Obelix fell into the magic potion as a boy.”	“Jim pappa arishta kalderamata vetune ape vasanavata.”	It’s our fortune that Jim pappa/ Obelix fell into the pot of magic potion.

2. Borrowing

Only one example of borrowing is noted in the three films. This example from *Asterix and Cleopatra* shows that the CSR, Tower of Pharaoh is kept as it is in the TL version. In the above category, it was discussed that landmarks are omitted by the translators. However, in this occasion, as the conversation directly involves the Tower of Pharaoh and its image can be seen on-screen, it is not possible to eliminate it. Therefore, the translators decided to borrow the reference from the RL. Yet, it can be noted that the name of the city Alexandria is omitted in the TL version.

RL	TL	Back translation into English
Asterix: "What's that light on the horizon?" Edifice: "That's the tower of Pharaoh. It guides ships into the harbour. We'll be in Alexandria tomorrow."	Asterix: "Mokakda etha eliyak penne?" Edifice: "E Egyptuwe thiyena Pharaoh kuluna. E eliyen reta new walata ethul wenna puluwan warayata."	What is that light in the distance? That's the Pharaoh tower in Egypt. Ships can enter the harbour with that light in the night.

3. Literal translation

The next strategy, Literal translation, is employed only on two (02) occasions. Both are given below: the first is from *Asterix Conquers America* and the second from *Asterix and Cleopatra*.

When applying this strategy, the translation should match the RL reference as closely as possible. In the examples, the translators provided a description that matched what was said in the RL. In the first example, Getafix remembers that to cure amnesia, thirty (30) pounds of roast pork must be eaten. In the TL version, a very literal translation of it is given: when the patient's stomach is full, he is cured of his illness. The TL translation lacks the details such as weight and the type of food; as it closely resembles the cure in the RL, this example is listed as a Literal translation.

In the second example, the Romans bring enormous catapults to destroy the Egyptian palace. Asterix calls them guided missiles. In the TL version, the translators explain what a catapult does, which is shooting stones. Though a name is not given to this machine in the TL, the literal translation enables the TL audience to understand what it is capable of doing and what is about to happen.

RL	TL	Back translation into English
Getafix: "The cure for amnesia is 30 pounds roast pork taken orally."	Getafix: "Ong balaganna bada piruna gaman minihata sihiya enava."	See, the moment his stomach is full, he'll become conscious.
Asterix: Hey, look! They've got guided missiles. Getafix: Huh! If they miss, I'll be surprised.	Asterix: Ung gal vidinnayi hadanne! Getafix: Oh! Wedunoth nam lesi venne ne.	They are going to shoot stones! Oh! If we get hit, won't be nice.

4. Equivalence

This particular strategy is employed by the translators four (04) times. To apply this particular strategy, the translators must look for a solution that has a similar meaning or performs a similar function from the TL. One example that shows the application of the strategy effectively, is given below. At the beginning of the film *Asterix Conquers America*, it is explained by the voice-over that the earth was believed to flat as a pizza. The translators find an equivalent from

the TL culture to replace the pizza in the comparison. The equivalent chosen is roti which is also flat and round. To point to the location of Rome, the translators refer to a piece of coconut replacing the anchovies. Though the strategy orients towards domestication, the TL audience, who are very familiar with roti and its ingredients, is able to understand the comparison easily.

Table 10. Example of equivalence

RL	TL	Back translation into English
Voice-over: “Everyone believed the earth was flat as a pizza. Right in the middle where the anchovies converge, was Rome”.	Voice-over: “Hemoma hithan hitiye eka rotiyak vage theti kiyala. E rotiya medde, pol kellak vage thibuna Rome”.	Everyone believed that the earth was flat like a roti. In the middle of the roti, there was Rome like a piece of coconut.

5. Adaptation

Adaptation, which is a form of equivalence, is practiced on fourteen (14) occasions, second only to Omission. This strategy “can encompass in fact different translational situations, from situational equivalence, to localisation, to an extreme form of rewriting” (Ranzato, 2016, p.77).

The two following examples are taken from *Asterix in Britain*. They refer to the magic potion brewed by the druid Getafix. In all the Sinhala dubbed films of *Asterix*, the magic potion is called the magic *arishte*. *Arishite* is an ancient ayurvedic preparation made “with decoctions of herbs in boiling water” (Panda et al., 2022). It is well known fact that in the target culture ayurvedic medicine is practiced alongside western medicine. As the *arishte* already possesses healing properties and is made with herbs, it is chosen to replace the magic potion. The term “magic *arishte*” was made popular by the Sinhala dubbed *Asterix* version. Though *arishte* is not an exact equivalent to the magic potion, but given its function and preparation, it is able to fulfill the role of the magic potion in the RL.

Further, as seen in the second example, the ingredients of the magic potion are equally replaced with local herbs: *aralu*, *bulu*, and *nelli*², frequently used in the ayurvedic medicine. The secret ingredients are not disclosed, indicating to the TL audience that they are meant to remain a secret.

Table 11. Examples of adaptation

RL	TL	Back translation into English
Vitalstatix: “Our great druid Getafix will brew up a magic potion for you.”	Vitalstatix: “Ape yuthukama thamayi nedeyinta udavu karana eka. Veda pappa gamakata hadala deyi magic arishite.”	Our duty is to help relatives. The druid will make a magic <i>arishte</i> (potion) enough for a whole village.
Getafix: “Get some honey, meat and lots of carrots. And I will gather mistletoe with a golden sickle.”	Getafix: “Jim pappe, chenam oya gihilla mipeni, aralui, bului, nelli hoyagena enna. Mang gihilla rahas beheth tika hoyagannam.	Then Jim pappe/Obelix, you go and find honey, <i>aralu</i> , <i>bulu</i> and <i>nelli</i> . I’ll go and find the secret ingredients.

2 *Aralu*, *bulu* and *nelli* are an important herbal formation known as *thripala* in ayurveda: Terminalia chebula (*aralu*), Terminalia bellerica (*bulu*), and Phyllanthus emblica (*nelli*).

In the Sinhala dubbed *Asterix* films, it has to be mentioned that all the proper names are translated or rather adapted to suit the TL culture. The famous -ix suffix is replaced with the term *pappa*. Accordingly, Asterix becomes Soora pappa, and Obelix is known as Jim pappa. It is seen in the previous example, Getafix or Veda pappa addresses Obelix as Jim pappe. This term *pappa*, often associated with Naththal pappa or Santa Clause, paints the picture of an elderly person with long hair, big belly and a beard (Jayawardena & Rodrigo, 2022). Given the fact that most Gauls have long hair and beards, the use of this term can be justified.

The following example is taken from *Asterix Conquers America*. In the description given by the voice-over, the village of the Gauls is introduced as Pappa village, meaning the village of the *pappas*. In the TL versions, they are never referred to as Gauls.

The Sinhala dubbed versions made the term *pappa* ever more popular in the TL. The series became widely known as *Soora pappa*. So much so that when Albert Uderzo, the co-creator of the original French series, died in 2020, the newspapers that reported the death had to include Asterix – “better known to many Sri Lankans as Soora pappa” (Mawlana, 2020). It can be assumed that the target audience is not aware of the origin of the series or the historical background of the characters. It can also be argued that the use of the *pappa* to call the Gauls contributed significantly to popularize the series in the TL.³

Table 12. Examples of adaptation		
RL	TL	Back translation into English
Voice-over: “Julius Caesar bestrode the world like a colossus... ..and his thumping great sandal came right down on top of Gaul.	Voice-over: “Mulu pradeshayama Roman karayanta baya vunata pappa game baya veli miyo vitharayi.”	Though everyone was scared of the Romans, in the <i>pappa</i> village only the moles are scared of them.

An adaptation of a different nature, taken from *Asterix and Cleopatra* can be seen in the example below. In this particular scene, Artifice and his sidekick Crewcut, prepare the poisonous cake to kill Cleopatra and frame the Gauls. The ingredients are poisonous: viper’s venom, cyanide and arsenic. In the TL version, local ingredients are chosen to transform the context more comprehensible to the audience. Though they are not the equivalents to the ingredients of the RL version, centipedes, scorpions, snake eggs and rat poison are suitable for this context. The local ingredient *niyagala* is a poisonous plant known in English as Glory Lilly or Flame Lilly (*Gloriosa superba*). Further, pancakes, macaroons and custard pie which are mostly western desserts, are replaced with dishes more familiar to the audience such as curry, sauté, and omelette.

The infamous Cake Song which follows next in the film is also adapted to entertain the target audience. The cake ingredients in the RL such as hemlock, opium, frog’s spawn, tadpole,

3 For a detailed discussion on the translation of proper names of *Asterix* into Sinhala, see Jayawardena & Rodrigo, 2022.

mandrake root, and vitriol are replaced with a mixture of genuine cake ingredients and poisonous ingredients in the TL: honey, wine, dates, peanuts, cashews, pepper, rat poison, snake, snake eggs, skull, lizard, and fangs of a cobra. The combination of ingredients used in the adaptation seems deadly and at the same time, appealing too. Sung rhythmically, the translators make the Cake Song, an entertaining experience to the target audience (Jayawardena, 2024).

Table 13. Examples of adaptation

RL	TL	Back translation into English
Artifice & Crewcut: “Ah poisonous pancakes! Yes. Murderous macaroons Not bad. Viper’s venom topped with cream. Hurrah! Cyanide custard pie. Great! Ah! Special iced arsenic cake.”	Artifice & Crewcut: “Paththeyo beduma! Ehune ne. Gonusu soup. Naraka ne. Niyagala hodda. Maru! Nai biththara omlet. Demu! Ada vishesha pasana cake. Anna hondai!”	Sauté of centipedes! Didn’t hear. Soup with scorpions. Not bad. Curry with <i>niyagala</i> Great! An omelette with snake eggs. Let’s give! Today’s special rat poison cake. That’s great!

6. Generalisation

Generalisation strategy was found seven (07) times in the study. In these examples, a CSR is replaced with a simpler term neutralising the reference. The first example is taken from *Asterix and Cleopatra*. The Gauls were taken inside the giant pyramid by Artifice’s sidekick Crewcut. He invites the group to come inside a chamber to see the magnificent hieroglyphics, a reference to the ancient Egyptian writing system. In the TL version, instead of hieroglyphics, a nonspecific term “wonderful things” is employed suggesting that the hieroglyphics are included among these wonderful things to be seen. Translating this particular term definitely poses a problem to the translators. The existing Sinhala equivalent, which is complex and uncommon, may confuse the target audience. Therefore, the translators opted for a general term that is easier to understand. Generalisation allows the translator to simplify the dubbed dialog to improve audience understanding (Pettit, 2009, p. 56). Further, Bruti remarks that the dialogs in cartoons are simplified, making them easy to understand for the intended audience (2014, p. 92-93).

Table 14. Example of generalisation

RL	TL	Back translation into English
Crewcut: “Come along in here, this room boasts some magnificent hieroglyphics.”	Crewcut: “Meke ethule shok deval thiyana balanna.”	There are wonderful things to see inside.

The second example seen in *Asterix Conquers America*, refers to food habits of the British. The Roman soldier tells the others to drink the warm beer, which they despise, before it gets cold. It is described as an acquired taste. In the TL, the unpleasant taste of the beer is neutralised. Instead, the Roman soldier simply says that now that they are in an inn, they should drink. The particular nature of the British beer is removed from the context by the translators.

RL	TL	Back translation into English
Soldier: "Go ahead. Drink it before it gets cold. It's an acquired taste."	Soldier: "Bonnane ave ithin bonava."	We came to drink. So, drink up.

7. Explication

The final strategy is found only on one occasion. This example seen in *Asterix in Britain* explains the prison in the Tower of London. Obelix who wakes up in a prison cell asks from Gaulix where he is. Though Gaulix replies that they are in the Tower of Londonium in the RL, in the TL, he only says a prison cell. To explain that the prison is located in a tower, a voice-over is added. In Sinhala, "hira gedara" literally means prison house. To stress on the specificity of this prison, the voice-over explains that it is not in fact a "gedara" (house) but a tower ("kanuwa" signifies tower in Sinhala). The on-screen image also helps to understand that the prisoners are kept in a tower. The translators decided to add an explanation to make the reference clearer to the target audience. The strategy "helps to explain cultural terms and to clarify the meaning of some word" (Pettit, 2009, p. 54).

RL	TL	Back translation into English
Obelix: "Where am I? Gaulix: "In the Tower of Londonium."	Voice-over: "hira gedarak kivvata meka gedarakma neveyi kanuwak". Obelix: "Eeh mama me koheda inne?" Peetara: "Koheda kiyala ahanne? Inne hira kuduwe."	Though it's a prison (house), it's not (a house), but a tower. Ah where am I? Where? In a prison cell.

Discussion

When considering the frequency in which the translation strategies are used, Omission (21 times), Adaptation (14 times), Generalisation (7 times) and Equivalence (4 times) come before the others. Together, these strategies remove or neutralise the CSRs of the RL. Adaptation and Equivalence find suitable replacements from the TL. These numbers indicate (46 out of 50) that the translators favoured a domestication approach bringing the dubbed films closer to the target audience. Borrowing which orients towards foreignization is used only once. In

a similar study based on the translation of the CSRs from English to Arabic in three Disney animated films, Adaptation tops the list of strategies while Omission, and Generalisation strategies were not at all used (Al-Yasin, 2022). It is interesting to note that though the two studies are centred on different sets of animated audiovisual texts, it can be argued that the TL used and the intended TL audience could have influenced the strategies of the translators to a considerable extent.

When looking at the CSRs that are omitted, they include food items, customs, landmarks, historical events/figures and also names of cities such as Alexandria and rivers like the Nile. Omission becomes unavoidable when an equivalent or a corresponding term is not found in the TL (Cintas & Rymael, 2007). However, in the TL dubbed films, it seems questionable why the translators took the decision to eliminate exact locations and references to several cultural items. Ranzato comments in her study that “CSRs are omitted in dubbing due to arbitrary or questionable decisions, hardly justifiable by technical or other forms of constraints” (2016, p. 94). She further explains that the term Elimination is preferred over Omission, because the former suggests a voluntary act of making the CSR disappear without a substitution (p.94).

When the CSRs are omitted or substituted, the target audience is left with general observations or substitutions from their own culture. On one hand the cultural richness for which *Asterix* is known, is lessened in the Sinhala dubbed version. On the other hand, notably for a young audience, it becomes easier to follow the story without being concerned about the historical or the cultural references. Having said that, a counter argument can be made to preserve the CSRs to make the cinematic experience more educational. Though all events may not be historically accurate, a young audience may take note of geographically locations, landmarks and historical figures that are still unknown to them.

The effect of the high number of Adaptations (14 times) and Generalisations (7 times) is worth examining. Examples of Adaptation are based on various aspects: food items, family relationships, and customs. They are adjusted to suit the TL culture and the audience. For the target audience, the familiar references seen in the Sinhala dubbed film, could make the experience more entertaining. Further, to apply Adaptation, the translators must be creative and talented. The translators must put in more effort to find aspects that are similar and, that can be modified to make them acceptable to the target culture. Their solutions such as the magic *arishte* and *pappa* have made the Sinhala dubbed version memorable. Pettit (2009) notes that in her study, Adaptation was more frequently used by in the dubbed version than in the subtitled version rendering the dialogs closer to the target language (p.54).

Generalisation, a form of domestication, weakens the richness of the CSRs. Yet it improves the audience understanding (p.56). As seen in the above examples, the translators provided solutions which contain neutral, and vague terms instead of CSRs. For example, in the conversation about beer, once the reference to warm beer is removed, it is no longer unique to Britain. That conversation between the soldiers could take place anywhere as it does not

contain a CSR to indicate where they are. In the films where the Gauls travel to different countries, the audience expect to witness strange and exotic cultural items. By eliminating, and neutralising these items, the films narrate a comic story without accentuating the richness of different cultures.

The number of Equivalentents, though less in number equally contribute to reinforce the domestication approach. Equivalentents are found for food items, and customs. The translators skilfully chose CSRs from the TL that perform a similar function as the items in the RL. In the examples based on food, pizza was replaced with roti, and gooseberry with durian. Two more examples were found related to customs: selling fish and numbering houses. As with Adaptation, this particular strategy offers replacements from the TL. However, the translators must ensure that these items can fulfil the requirements of the RL items. For example, to replace the pizza, the TL food item must also be flat and round and must contain an ingredient visible on the top to pin point the location of Rome. Similarly, a large local fruit that is round and contains spikes on the external shell was required to replace Hannibal's gooseberry in the RL. Durian (*Durio zibethinus*), grown in South Asian and Southeast Asian countries, is a popular fruit that fits the description. It is amusing and at the same time, unbelievable that Romans would know about this fruit because durian is not that well-known internationally. However, on both occasions, the translators succeeded in achieving equivalence semantically and visually.

Explication is another strategy that orients towards foreignization, but only one example of it is found in the study. It may be more difficult to practise as it requires a paraphrase inserted to explain the CSR. Similarly, for Replacement for which an example was not found appears complicated because it needs to be supported by “an on-screen gesture or a visual clue” (p. 45).

Conclusion

After closely examining the results, it can be concluded that the translators favoured an overwhelmingly domesticated approach when translating the CSRs in the dubbed audiovisual texts. By eliminating, replacing, and neutralising the CSRs, the TL texts becomes simplified, easier to understand as it's expected in cartoon talk. Further, Bogucki's (2016) comment on domestication being justified only in “imaginary worlds” is applicable here. It is possible that the translators may have applied the domestication strategies more liberally in the TL as the dubbed audiovisual texts are animated films. In the case of *Asterix* dubbed in Sinhala, though heavily domesticated, the audiovisual series still became popular in the TL.

The study brings to light the different domestication strategies practiced by the translators that succeed in bringing the TL texts closer to the audience. Each strategy has its advantages as well as its disadvantages. The translators must weigh the efficiency and the consequences and choose the strategies that suit the TL and TL audience the most. The present study reveals the skills and the creativity of the translators in selecting the strategies that contributed to popularize the TL texts. The ingenuity of the translators and their knowledge of both the source

culture and the target culture become key factors in offering effective solutions.

The target audience is another crucial factor that effects the translators' decision. Antonini and Chiaro (2009) stresses the need to involve the audience in research on audiovisual translation rather focusing primarily on the texts and the translator. An audience, for whom the dubbed text is meant for, should be allowed to comment on the strategies used in the TL. Future research that includes analysis of the translation as well as comments of the target audience, undoubtedly would be extremely useful for the scholars as well as the industry.

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