

52. Translating the archaic: Ottoman Turkish expressions in English

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APA: Tekalp, S. (2022). Translating the archaic: Ottoman Turkish expressions in English. *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Arařtırmaları Dergisi*, (Ö11), 735-744. DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.1146765.

Abstract

This study deals with how archaic language in İhsan Oktay Anar's *Kitab'ül Hiyel* is handled in English translation. Archaic expressions refer to words or phrases which are no longer in everyday use. In *Kitab'ül Hiyel*, archaism standing out as the outcome of the author's stylistic choices prevails as a stylistic component. Translating style is one of the most challenging tasks that a translator faces due to the linguistic differences between languages. In this paper, a descriptive translational analysis is pursued to evaluate whether the translator keeps the local color by making a stylistically-aware translation or the ruling archaism becomes neutralized in the target text. This is important in its aim to demonstrate the attitude of translators towards stylistic elements. Archaic expressions were chosen as samples because they have rarely been the subject of research in translation studies. They can also be associated with history to a great extent. Taking into account Turkish culture, archaic expressions used in literature are generally traced back to the Ottoman Empire, for they are regarded as a significant part of old Turkish or Ottoman Turkish. When their historical quality is considered, their translation requires certain knowledge about the source culture and history. Throughout the comparative analysis, archaic expressions in parallel texts were examined in the light of these translation strategies: softening, transcription or borrowing, and stylistic compensation. The result of the analysis will contribute to the stylistic and cultural discussions about literary translation.

Keywords: Archaic expressions, compensation, *Kitab'ül Hiyel*, stylistic translation

Arkaizmin çevirisi: Osmanlıca ifadelerin İngilizceye çevrilmesi

Öz

Bu çalışma, İhsan Oktay Anar'ın *Kitab'ül Hiyel* adlı eserindeki arkaik dilin İngilizce'ye nasıl çevrildiğini ele almaktadır. Arkaik ifadeler, artık günlük kullanımda olmayan kelimelere veya deyimlere atıfta bulunur. *Kitab'ül Hiyel*'de geniş ölçüde hüküm süren arkaizm, yazarın biçimsel tercihlerinin bir sonucu olarak öne çıkar. Biçemin çevirisi, diller arasındaki farklılıklar nedeniyle bir çevirmenin karşılaştığı en zorlu görevlerden biridir. Bu çalışmada betimsel bir çeviri analizi yapılarak şu soruya yanıt aranacaktır: Çevirmen biçim bilincine sahip bir çeviri yaparak yerel rengi korumuş mudur, yoksa erek metinde egemen olan arkaizmin etkileri ortadan kaldırılmış mıdır? Bu değerlendirme, çevirmenlerin biçimsel unsurlara karşı tutumlarını göstermek açısından önemlidir. Arkaik ifadeler çeviribilimde nadiren araştırma konusu oldukları için örneklem olarak seçilmiştir. Ayrıca bu ifadeler büyük ölçüde tarihle de ilişkilendirilebilirler. Türk kültürü nezdinde, edebiyatta kullanılan arkaik ifadeler eski Türkçe veya Osmanlıca'nın önemli bir parçası olarak kabul edildiğinden genellikle Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na kadar uzanır. Tarihsel nitelikleri göz önüne alındığında, bu unsurların çevirisi kaynak kültür ve tarih hakkında belirli bir bilgi birikimi gerektirir. Karşılaştırmalı

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analiz boyunca paralel metinlerdeki arkaik ifadeler şu çeviri stratejileri ışığında incelenmiştir: yumuşatma, çeviri yazı veya ödünçleme ve biçimsel ödünçleme. Bu analiz, edebi çeviri ile ilgili biçimsel ve kültürel tartışmalara katkı sağlayacaktır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Arkaik ifadeler, biçimsel çeviri, *Kitab'ül Hiyel*, ödünçleme

1. Introduction

Style as a language-specific aspect in literary texts has been on the agenda of translation studies since ancient times. It is known that, in the first century BC, Cicero, Horace, and St. Jerome all centered their attention on style when translation came into question. Leech & Short (1981) conceive style as “the linguistic characteristics of a particular text” (p. 12). Baker (2000) makes a more comprehensive definition by referring to style “as a kind of thumb-print that is expressed in a range of linguistic – as well as non-linguistic – features” (p. 245). She states that:

Traditionally, literary stylistics has focused on what are assumed to be conscious linguistic choices on the part of the writer, because literary stylisticians are ultimately interested in the relationship between linguistic features and artistic function, in how a given writer achieves certain artistic effects (p. 246).

Nevertheless, she chooses to identify the style of a specific author as conscious or subconscious “patterns of choice” (p. 246). The author’s literary style needs as much attention from the translator as the linguistic and cultural elements in a text. It is one of the tasks of the translator to analyze the style in a text and formulate specific strategies to recreate it in his/her way. However, is the translator actually responsible for recreating the style? In fact, there are differing views on the issue. Some of the leading scholars such as Baker (2000), Boase-Beier (2006), and Parks (2007) believe that translators should stick to the author’s style whereas a considerable group of scholars (Bosseaux, 2007; Hermans, 1996; Malmkjær, 2004; Venuti, 1998) argues that translators inevitably diverge from the original style for it is difficult to maintain it. No matter which route they take, they are confronted with the challenge of creating either a new style given the reader's expectations, or a duplication of the original style. Therefore, it would perhaps become the most applicable solution to ensure a balance between the foreignization and domestication of the stylistic elements.

The main focus of this paper is the translation of archaic expressions as stylistic components. Archaism refers to “the use of words or constructions that have passed out of the language before the time of writing; or a particular example of such an obsolete word or expression” (Baldick, 2001, p. 18). It is a type of language variety which is mainly based on history. Leuven-Zwart (1989, p. 163) handles archaism as a *time* element that is rooted in history. Archaism in literary texts manifests itself in the use of outdated words, idioms, or syntactic structures. In this study, archaic expressions were chosen as the object of analysis as they have been under-researched in translation studies so far. Besides, due to the difficulty of both understanding and transferring these expressions, there are no prescribed strategies for their translation. This study aims to demonstrate the translator’s treatment of these formidable elements, his choice of strategies as well as his overall attitude in terms of stylistic choices. To that end, İhsan Oktay Anar’s *Kitab'ül Hiyel*, which covers a large number of Ottoman Turkish expressions, was investigated in parallel with its English translation *The Book of Devices*. Translation strategies were determined through an eclectic method.

2. Ottoman Turkish expressions as the tokens of archaism

Ottoman Turkish, a standardized register of the Turkish of Turkey under the influence of Arabic and Persian, was the language of the countries ruled by the Ottoman Empire from the thirteenth to twentieth centuries. Though not the same thing, Ottoman Turkish is usually referred to as Old Turkish. Develi (2001) divides the Ottoman Turkish into three periods:

- a) Old Ottoman Turkish (Old Anatolian Turkish) (13th-mid 15th centuries)
- b) Classical Ottoman Turkish (mid 15th-19th centuries)
- c) New Ottoman Turkish (Tanzimat Reform Era-1908) (p. 15)

Ottoman Turkish had a 36-letter alphabet that emerged from a blending of Arabic and Persian alphabets. It possesses such a rich vocabulary that it was considered the closest language to English in terms of the abundance of words (Develi, 2001, p. 15). Regarding the language, Shafak (2005) states that “the language of the Ottoman time is quite magic and unique. And it takes the same effort to learn it today as it does to learn another language” (para. 8). It became an official language under the name “Turkish” with the Kanun-i Esasi (The Ottoman Basic Law) that entered into force in 1826. It was rather used as a written language than a spoken language used in daily life. The written version was mostly employed by educated people, the ruling class, and literary figures. In the nineteenth century, the effect of Western Literature brought about a shift in the language. With the Turkish Language (Alphabet) Reform in 1928, five years after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the language was cleansed from the Arabic script and the period of modern Turkey Turkish with 29 letters has started. It was carried out as part of modernization and “Turkeyfication” as Shafak (2005, para. 8) puts it. Today, Ottoman Turkish is mostly encountered in literature, particularly in the works of some prominent Turkish authors like Orhan Pamuk, Elif Shafak, and İhsan Oktay Anar. They consciously choose this archaic language for the sake of reviving Turkish history and ancient culture.

The archaic language was also predominantly used in Anar’s *Kitab-ül Hiyel*. It was spotted in the source text thanks to some distinctive features of the vocabulary. For example, the use of accented letters (e.g. â, û, î) was helpful for the detection of archaic expressions. Besides, it became easy to discover archaic language through compound words formed by the Persian genitive construction “-” (Versteegh & Eid, 2005), such as *râviyân-ı ahbar*, *tebaa-yı şahane*, *tek-i âlâ*, *Vaka-yı Hayriye*, etc. Also, the use of inverted commas (e.g. *bid’at*); two adjacent consonants (e.g. *küffar*, *hüccet*, *muva^{kk}it*, *zülkarneyn*); words ending in “b,c,d,g” consonants (*şakirdlik*); and words that do not comply with vowel harmony (*piştov*, *hîlat*, *tahtelbahir*, *gulfe*, etc.) which are unconventional in modern Turkish were among the indicators of archaic usage. Lastly, those words and expressions that have rare or no usage in daily language and that sound unfamiliar to the reader were marked as archaic. *İhsan Oktay Anar Online Dictionary* (*İhsan Oktay Anar Sözlüğü*, n.d.) which was put into the service of his readers for whom these expressions may sound incomprehensible was of great assistance to look up the meaning of archaic expressions. For the same purpose, *Luggat Ottoman-Turkish Online Dictionary* became illuminating. As for the different usages and etymologies of the terms in the English text, *Online Etymology Dictionary* and *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* were helpful. In total, seventy-five archaic expressions were selected for investigation.

3. İhsan Oktay Anar and his unique style

Anar as a novelist is characterized by his unique way of using the Turkish language. Akatlı (1999) identifies him as “kendini doğrudan doğruya ‘Osmanlıca’ aracılığıyla tanıtan bir yazar” [an author who makes himself known directly by means of ‘Ottoman Turkish’]² (p. 1). The author completed his graduate and postgraduate education in Philosophy. He is a member of the PEN Association of Writers and the Turkish Authors Association. His first novel *Puslu Kıtalar Atlası* was published in 1995, and since then he has published six novels. His vast knowledge of philosophy manifests itself in the deepness of the themes and characters that prevail in his works. Philosophy is not the only unfathomable element in his novels. They are also embroidered with incomprehensible words and phrases taken from the old Turkish which is a mixture of Arabic and Persian. In this regard, Yıldız states:

The unbearable "point" of İhsan Oktay Anar's writings is the Ottoman dominance in his language, hence the abundance of Arabic and Persian words ... Such a longing for Arabic and Persian was not the case for even Tercüman writers of the 70s. (2014, para. 9)

While Yıldız ascribes the dominance of Arabic and Persian words to Anar's animosity towards the Turkish language, Karaca values it as a prerequisite for establishing the setting of a historical novel:

Sometimes, the author tries to establish a connection of reality with the period by using some 18th - century addressing words. In this context, in the novel, “Behey civelegim” (KH, p. 28), “Behey teres” (KH, p. 30), “Ey efendim” (KH, p. 17), “Abe ne biçim iştir bu!” (KH, p. 45), “Catch the cress immediately” (KH, p. 45), addressing words belonging to that period are encountered. In this way, the author tries to capture a language that unifies both the time of occurrence and time of reading of the work by using Ottoman Turkish and modern Turkish at the same time. (2010, p. 116)

Moreover, the dominance of historical and mythological elements interspersed throughout the books promotes his archaic style. Heavily laden with the traces of the postmodern novel, his works are multifaceted in that he brings together the East and the West, archaic and the modern, the lower and the upper class, folk culture and courtly life, formal and colloquial language. In his study, Öz (2018) focuses on Anar's contradictory manner of using the Turkish language under the influence of postmodernism. He argues that Anar purposefully rules out the Turkish language in terms of syntax, grammar, and spelling. Among the anomalous usages, he highlights the prevalence of accented letters, inconsistencies in the use of lower and uppercase, compound words written separately or vice versa, the application of Arabic and Persian noun phrase rules, and wrong spelling of words. From the richness of Turkish vocabulary dominated by old Turkish, it would not be fallacious to assert that he actually writes in Ottoman Turkish. In an interview, Anar acknowledges that he uses “a special language” (Gümüş, 2013, para. 17). Taking his sources from traditional folk stories, mythology, Islam, and Ottoman history, he literally takes the reader back to ancient times. Regarding Anar's writing, Sazyek (2002) rightfully puts that:

Although it is close to the features of today's Turkish in terms of syntax, the archaic density based on words is in harmony with the historical appearance of the novel. This identifies the narrator in Anar's novels with the identity of a “chronicler”. This narrator is more like a “heretic” than a narrator of a novel. (2014, para. 9)

4. An archaic novella: *Kıtab-ül Hiyel*

According to Akatlı (1999), what Anar endeavors to do in his works is “tarihsel gerçeklerden yararlanarak yeni gerçeklik imkanları yaratma [to create new reality opportunities by making use of

² All translations from Turkish to English belong to me.

historical facts]” (p. 5), under the influence of his career in philosophy. History, mythology, and philosophy always go hand in hand in his books. Narrating the Ottoman times in a fictional world, Anar’s second book *Kitab’ül Hiyel - Eski Zaman Mucitlerinin İnanılmaz Hayat Öyküleri* (1996) is characterized as a historical novel(1a). It is set in nineteenth-century Istanbul, a period that covers the Ottoman times ranging from the reign of Sultan Selim III (1789-1807) to the Second Constitutional Period (1908). Moreover, having the characteristic of the postmodern text, the book can well be evaluated as pluralistic and intertextual. There are plenty of allusions to western and eastern philosophy, fantastic elements as well as Turkish folklore and Islamic mysticism. The novel’s narrative construction is based on the eastern narrative tradition which benefits from traditional storytelling, *meddah*³, and parables. The book narrates the interrelated stories of three inventors who engage in the science of devices: Yafes Chelebi, Calûd, and Üzeyir Bey. Under the three main chapters, Anar also tells the substories of different characters which add richness and color to the text. The book was translated into English by the Binghamton University professor Gregory Key in 2016 with the name *The Book of Devices – The incredible life histories of inventors of yore*.

5. Translation of archaic expressions

Although one can encounter studies that propose a variety of strategies for translating the style, those focusing particularly on the translation of archaism in literary texts are rare to find. Venuti (1998), reporting a minoritizing translation project in *The Scandals of Translation*, touches on his translations of I.U. Tarchetti’s works and how he renders archaic terms from Italian to English through a foreignizing approach (p. 15). Instead of replacing archaic expressions with more colloquial ones, he indicates how he chooses to juxtapose the ancient and modern. Huang (2011), on the other hand, suggests using an archaic variation of the target language in place of the archaic language in the original text:

In order to foreground the Classical Chinese proverbs, I recommend translating them into Shakespearean English. I see Shakespearean language as the English equivalent of Chinese classicalism; alternatively one might think of the language of Milton or the King James Bible, as candidates (p. 151).

However, this method seems hard to implement as it requires a good command of the target linguistic system. In line with this approach, Harvey (1995, p. 66) suggests stylistic compensation to make up for the losses that stem from the author’s style. This technique can be practical for the translation of archaic expressions. The studies that focus on translating stylistic elements, (K. Harvey, 1995; Hermans, 1996; Malmkjær, 2004), especially those that deal with slang terms, have been useful in determining the strategies in this study. For example, softening, stylistic compensation, and direct transfers offered by Zauberga (1994) for the translation of slang could be applied to the archaic language. In this study, the comparison of archaic expressions in parallel texts was made in light of three strategies that were determined as a result of a thorough analysis of the items: softening, transcription/borrowing, and stylistic compensation.

5.1. Softening

Softening here refers to the neutralization of archaic terms. When an archaic item is translated by softening, it often loses its formal quality and sounds more natural or familiar to the reader. Therefore, the frequency of its usage leads to the formulation of the target text without the traces of the author’s style. While labeling the softened items, it was observed that the translator resorted to different

³ A traditional Turkish storyteller who performed at the coffeehouses in front of small groups.

techniques. Most of the archaic expressions that were softened went through literal translation losing their stylistic effect. The title of the book in the first place was rendered by softening. The expression *Kıtab-ül Hiyel* involves two archaic indicators: the genitive construction “-ül” and the word *hiyel* as an old Turkish term that is not used today. Neutralizing it as *The Book of Devices* inevitably wipes out the archaic nature of the term. Apart from that, for some of the items, the translator made use of functional equivalence which maintained the function of the item in the text, yet not the archaism it implies. For example, *zat-ı şahane* as a form of address to the Ottoman sultans was rendered by *his majesty* which is rather used as a form of address to the emperors or kings in the western culture. The examples for softening chosen out of 52 samples can be seen in Table 1.

<i>Kıtab-ül Hiyel</i>	Page No.	<i>The Book of Devices</i>	Page No.
hayretü minnet	11	wonder and admiration	13
nefretü ibret	11	disdain and admonition	13
rivayet-i mevsukadandır	14	It is an attested tradition that...	16
zat-ı şahane	15	his majesty	17
Nizam-ı Cedid	16	New Order	17
tebaa-yı şahane	17	Imperial Subjects	18
Ordu-yu Hümayûn	25	Imperial Army	26
Babâli	26	Sublime Porte	26
reisül-küttab	29	minister of foreign affairs	29
Çeşm-i Elâ	39	Hazel-Eyed	38
müdde-i ömür	69	The span of (his) life	65
devr-i tahayyül	69	fanciful imaginings	65
Çeşm-i Badem	73	Almond-Eyed	67
ihтира beratı	26	patent	27
hüccet	27	voucher	27
camadan	38	waistcoat	38
tahtelbahir	50	a submarine vessel	52
pereme	58	ferry	55
garaib defteri	73	the curiosities register	67
reisületibba	73	chief physician	67
kalafat yiğitbaşısı	76	warden of the caulkers' guild	69

Table 1. Archaic expressions translated by *softening*

5.2. Transcription or borrowing

Described by Newmark (1988, p. 75) as the basic translation procedure, transcription refers to adoption, transfer, or ‘loan words’. Borrowing similarly indicates “a word or expression borrowed directly from another language, in its form and meaning” (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995, p. 340). Transcription or ‘borrowing’, though not distinct from each other, are proposed in tandem by Harvey (2003) as one of the principles for the translation of culture-bound terms. While borrowing points to a direct transfer of the source text item to the target text, transcription additionally involves a phonetic transfer. Besides, as Harvey (1995) puts it, “where no knowledge of the SL is presumed in the reader, transcription [or

borrowing] is accompanied by a gloss or a translator's note" (p. 5). In *The Book of Devices*, there are six instances of transcription and seven instances of borrowing, with or without a gloss.

<i>Kitab-ül Hiyele</i>	Page No.	<i>The Book of Devices</i>	Page No.
debbâbe	20	dabbaba	22
<i>düşahî</i>	34	<i>düşahi</i> , which means "bifurcated"	33
Sultanîyegâh fashî	42	sultaniyegah mode	41
tek-i âlâ	49	<i>tek-i ala</i> "the exalted shot"	50
istanbulin	90	stambouline frock coats	82
tiryak	105	Theriacs	97

Table 2. Archaic expressions translated by *transcription*

<i>Kitab-ül Hiyele</i>	Page No.	<i>The Book of Devices</i>	Page No.
sofyan ... usulde	13	<i>sofyan</i> (pattern)	15
<i>zülkarneyn</i>	36	<i>zülkarneyn</i> , or "possessor of two horns"	35
<i>Kallab</i>	45	<i>kallab</i> , or "agitator"	45
Sekban-ı Cedid	46	Sekban-ı Cedid army	47
münfelik	55	the <i>münfelik</i> or "fulminant"	54
Ayn-ı Ekber	74	Ayn-ı Ekber	68
darbzen	114	darbzen	104

Table 3. Archaic expressions translated by *borrowing*

5.3. Stylistic compensation

Harvey (1995) defines compensation as "a technique for making up for the loss of a source text effect by recreating a similar effect in the target text through means that are specific to the target language and/or the target text" (p. 66). Stylistic compensation is the most challenging method for the translator as it demands stylistic awareness. In this way, the author's style can be preserved in the target text. The compensation of the archaic expressions was ensured by the translator in different ways. Sometimes he took advantage of the archaic terms in English. Fuzûlî's poem and Lamiî Çelebi's verses in the last chapter (*Kitab-ül Hiyele*, p. 148) are good cases exemplifying stylistic compensation:

Gâh bir harf sükutıyla kılır nâdir-i nâr	Betimes a letter dropped changes scarcity to plenty
Gâh bir nokta kusurıyla gözi kör eyler	Betimes a dot deficient renders blind the eye
Fuzûlî	

Nimet-i rüyeti körler ne bilür	Of sight's blessing what know the blind?
Anı göz ehli bilür kör ne bilür	The eye-ful know, what know the blind?
Lamiî Çelebi	

Betimes is a term that belongs to archaic usage which means "in good time" (Betimes, 2022). It is a time expression and here it replaces the archaic word *gâh* which means "sometimes" in old Turkish. In the second poem, one can see linguistic structures from the divan literature (e.g. *bilür*) as well as the archaic expression *nimet-i rüyet*. *Bilür* is the spoiled form of *bilir* [know(s)]. The translator makes up for this special usage by similarly changing the forms of the word *eye-ful* by splitting it, and using the extraordinary structure *what know the blind?*. In some cases, the translator substitutes the archaic

expression in the source text for another archaic word or phrase in the source language. To illustrate, *mükerrûlar*, demon-like creatures, was rendered by the *ghouls* which originated from Arabic *ghûl* (Ghoul, 2022). In a similar vein, the archaism ensured by the obsolete terms *nekkâre* and *çiftenara* was compensated by the addition of *Allahu ekber* to the target text, although these terms were rendered by softening. For *paluze*, which implies an Ottoman dessert made from amygdal, sugar, and walnut, the translator uses *blancmange*, a word rooted in Middle English. A similar strategy was applied for *tizap*, a chemical compound, *badaluşka*, a type of cannon in the Ottoman army, and *muganni*, an old Turkish word for “singer”. In place of these terms, the translator opted for more old-fashioned English words such as *aqua fortis* (Latin, 15th c.), *basilisk* (16th-century medium cannon) and *songster* (12th c.), which is more obsolete than “singer”. As the last sample, *gulfe* was translated as *prepuce*, a technical term rooted in Latin used for the foreskin.

<i>Kitab-ül Hiyel</i>	<i>Page No.</i>	<i>The Book of Devices</i>	<i>Page No.</i>
paluze	12	blancmange	13
tizap	12	aqua fortis	14
nekkâre ve çiftenara feryatları	25	to prayers and battle cries of Allahu ekber	26
gulfe	76	prepuce	69
namenüvis	81	amanuensis	74
badaluşka	114	basilisks	104
mükerrûlar(ın)	131	ghouls	117
muganni	145	songster	128

Table 4. Archaic expressions translated by *stylistic compensation*

6. Conclusion

This paper has investigated how archaic expressions are handled in literary translation. To that end, *Kitab-ül Hiyel* by İhsan Oktay Anar, a postmodernist author who mostly writes historical novels, has been chosen to be analyzed. Archaism stands out as one of the indicators of the author’s style which needs to be taken into account in translation. It says a lot about the narrative, the level of formality, the setting, and the characters. It also influences the way readers interpret the presented facts. In *Kitab-ül Hiyel*, archaic expressions take the reader back to history, that of the Ottoman Empire in a fictional world. Their neutralization in the target text may ruin the historical, mythological, and folkloric nature of the text. Therefore, translators are expected to act in a stylistically-aware manner and foreignize the source text. However, this is not often the case as it might be a challenge to imitate an author’s unique style due to linguistic disparities. In this regard, it was noticed that studies focusing on the translation of archaic expressions are still lacking. Further research seemed to be necessary to uncover whether translators can keep the style of the original text, and, if yes, how they manage to do it.

The abundance of the archaic expressions in *Kitab-ül Hiyel* made it possible to extract a great number of them to be compared with their target equivalents. Seventy-five among them were randomly chosen to be analyzed in parallel texts. These outdated Ottoman Turkish expressions and their English counterparts were compared given these translation strategies that were categorized using an eclectic method: softening, transcription or borrowing, and stylistic compensation. The findings showed that softening is the most frequently used strategy throughout the translation. This indicated that the archaic expressions were neutralized so that the target text could be read more fluently. Although this approach

brings about a more readable text, it wipes out the archaic and historical quality of the original, thus making the translator invisible. On the other hand, nearly thirty percent of the selected items were translated by stylistic compensation, transcription, or borrowing. Preserving the local color in this way is significant in that it provides the reader clues about Turkish history, language, and culture. From the analysis, it can also be inferred that stylistic compensation can be carried out in different ways.

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