

# Venuti's Invisibility in the Institutional Field: The Case of Türkiye's Directorate for EU Affairs

## Kurumsal Alanda Venuti'nin Görünmezlik Kavramı: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti AB Başkanlığı Örneği

### Abstract

This study re-examines Lawrence Venuti's concept of translator invisibility by shifting its application from literary translation to the institutional field. While Venuti links invisibility to textual fluency, this study distinguishes this effect from the structural erasure of the translator as a professional subject. It argues that institutional invisibility is a structural necessity rather than a choice, stemming from organizational norms and the requirement for a unified institutional voice. Unlike their literary counterparts, institutional translators are rendered invisible by the very nature of production processes that anonymize their work, limit their decision-making authority, and obscure their individual contributions within complex workflows. Therefore, the study proposes a contextual adaptation of Venuti's framework, suggesting that while textual invisibility remains a structural requirement, translatorial agency is renegotiated through "organizational visibility." This framework suggests that translators assert their visibility not through stylistic resistance, but by exercising participatory agency to construct the institution's linguistic infrastructure. To analyze these dynamics, the study draws on the Directorate for EU Affairs as an illustrative case.

**Keywords:** Institutional translation, translator invisibility, organizational visibility, participatory agency, Venuti

### Öz

Bu çalışma Lawrence Venuti'nin çevirmen görünmezliği kavramını edebi çeviri alanından kurumsal alana taşıyarak yeniden incelemektedir. Venuti görünmezliği metinsel akıcılıkla ilişkilendirirken bu çalışma söz konusu durumu çevirmenin profesyonel bir özne olarak yapısal silinmesi şeklinde tanımlayarak edebi yaklaşımdan ayırmaktadır. Çalışma, kurumsal görünmezliğin bir tercihten ziyade, organizasyonel normlardan ve birleşik bir kurumsal sese duyulan ihtiyaçtan kaynaklanan yapısal bir gereklilik olduğunu savunmaktadır. Edebi çeviri yapan meslektaşlarının aksine, kurumsal çevirmenler, çalışmalarını anonimleştiren, karar verme yetkilerini sınırlayan ve karmaşık iş akışları içindeki bireysel katkılarını gizleyen üretim süreçlerinin doğası gereği görünmez kılınırlar. Bu nedenle çalışma, Venuti'nin çerçevesinin bağlamsal bir uyarlamasını önermekte; metinsel görünmezlik yapısal bir zorunluluk olarak kalsa da çevirmen eylemliliğinin "organizasyonel görünürlük" aracılığıyla yeniden müzakere edildiğini ileri sürmektedir. Bu çerçeve, çevirmenlerin görünürlüklerini stilistik direniş yoluyla değil, kurumun dilsel altyapısını inşa eden katılımcı eylemlilik yoluyla ortaya koyduklarını savunmaktadır. Çalışma, söz konusu dinamikleri incelemek amacıyla, Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı'nı bir vaka örneği olarak temel almaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kurumsal çeviri, çevirmen görünmezliği, organizasyonel görünürlük, katılımcı eylemlilik, Venuti

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## Introduction

Translator invisibility, introduced by Lawrence Venuti in the 1990s, has become a foundational, yet increasingly debated, concept in translation studies. Venuti (1995) defines this “multifaceted phenomenon” through “two mutually determining” layers: an “illusionistic effect of discourse” at the textual level and a prevailing “practice of reading and evaluating translations” within the professional sphere (p. 1). The illusionary effect of the discourse, according to Venuti, is achieved through the fluency of translated text, which creates “the appearance... that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the original” (p. 1). The result is the systematic erasure of the translator’s presence from the text. The practice of reading and evaluating translations, on the other hand, is related to the Anglo-American publishing industry’s insistence on natural-sounding translation. This insistence, however, is not based on an innocent aesthetic preference, but on an ideological discourse that obscures the translator’s identity and makes dominant cultural norms even more visible (1995, pp. 1-6).

The present study aims to re-evaluate translator invisibility by shifting the analytical focus from textual outputs to the institutional frameworks that determine translation production, thereby uncovering structural modes of visibility available to translators working within restrictive bureaucratic landscapes. While existing scholarship largely centers on the social aspects of the field, ranging from the institutional habitus and the resulting sense of professional belonging (Koskinen, 2008) to professional status and identity (Dam & Ruokonen, 2024; Ruokonen & Mäkisalo, 2018), this study posits invisibility not as an identity-based consequence, but as an unavoidable structural requirement. Adopting a qualitative and conceptual analysis approach, the study highlights the stark contrast between literary aesthetics and the functional rigors of institutional texts. My aim is not to propose yet another meta-theory, but to critically re-assess the theoretical boundaries of invisibility when transferred to the institutional field.

To examine the invisibility of the institutional translator from a concrete perspective, the study uses the Directorate for EU Affairs in Türkiye (Avrupa Birliği Başkanlığı, hereafter The Directorate) as a case illustration, where rigid rules and cycles of mass revisions functionally anonymize the individual translator. Two key groups of documents, found on the institution's official website, were selected through purposive sampling. The first group consists of the *Guide for Translation of the EU Acts* (Avrupa Birliği Mevzuatı Çeviri Rehberi, 2017; hereafter the Guide), and its accompanying *Annex Booklet* (Ekler Kitapçığı; hereafter The Annex, 2017), which allow for the examination of procedural norms governing the translation process. The formal and technical rules in these guides were identified through qualitative document analysis and defined as structural requirements restricting the translator. The second group of documents consists of the institution's current administrative activity reports for the years 2023 and 2024, which are also accessible from the institution’s website. In this group, discourse analysis was used to examine whether there were any statements that make the translator visible, such as expressions of gratitude, appreciation, or mentions of the translator group in relation to ongoing projects. The analysis began with a search in the reports using the keyword “translator” to examine the contexts in which it was used. Subsequently, drawing on the literature review, I investigated whether the institution acknowledged the translators' contributions to the TermAB project (Terminology Database of the Directorate for EU Affairs), a major collaborative effort. In the analysis process, Venuti's (1995) concept of invisibility was applied to the institutional context, and formal restrictions in the guidelines were classified as structural norms. Finally, data were analyzed using a descriptive approach to reveal how translator decisions are predetermined.

This anonymity inherent in institutional settings inevitably raises a central question: Is the regaining of agency within such rigid structures a realistic prospect or merely a utopian pursuit? Against the view of agency as a utopian impossibility, the study argues that a certain kind of visibility is indeed possible. This reclamation, however, is not achieved through individual stylistic intervention; rather, it emerges through what Dam and Ruokonen (2024, p. 81) term “organizational visibility”. Building on the sociological framework of Dam and Ruokonen, which defines organizational visibility as a specific sub-dimension of professional visibility (2024, p. 81), encompassing the translator's formal presence in organizational charts, internal websites, and linguistic guidelines, this study proposes that such visibility is not a passive state, but a byproduct of “participatory agency”. Translators regain their visibility, consequently, not through stylistic resistance, but by exercising technical authority in designing the institution’s linguistic infrastructure.

### Venuti’s Concept of Invisibility

Venuti’s concept of invisibility refers to the dominant practice in Anglo-American translation where the translator’s presence

is erased in order to create a fluent, transparent text. Widely praised and encouraged by publishers and reviewers, this preference for fluency aims to obliterate any visible linguistic or cultural traces of the source text. The reader is thus presented with an illusion: a sense of reading a work in its unmediated form rather than a derivative construction (1995, pp. 1-2). Venuti identifies this as a “domesticating strategy” where the foreign text is aggressively reshaped to fit the linguistic and cultural expectations of the target audience. The goal is, ostensibly and arguably, to provide the reader with effortless “access to great thoughts” (1995, p. 5). The transparency of this final product also leads to the professional erasure of the translator as an intermediary in the process, as the reader forgets the text is indeed a translation. If we consider this as a process with a beginning and an end, translator’s invisibility is a result emerging at the very end of the chain.

From this perspective, Venuti’s theory did more than merely shifting the discourse; it clearly revealed how translators’ agency in the translation process is systematically erased. Deprived of visibility, the translator, in Venuti’s (1995) words, began to become a “shadowy existence,” receiving minimum recognition for their work. In other words, the translator’s individual mark was sacrificed for the sake of fluency. Inadequate legal protections also served to aggravate an already precarious situation for the translators. This is particularly evident in copyright legislation and the contractual terms under which translators typically work (Venuti, 1995, p. 8). Invisibility thus moves beyond a simple stylistic preference, becoming an ideological tool that structurally disempowers the translator.

To resist this systemic marginalization and the erasure of cultural differences—that is, to enable the translator to say, “I am here, and I have translated this text”—Venuti (1995, p. 17) advocates the “foreignizing approach” as an ethical and political stance. This approach can be defined as conscious resistance to the prevailing norms of the target culture to preserve the foreignness of the source text. By doing so, both the act of translation and the translator’s mediating role are intentionally foregrounded. The fundamental idea is to strike a blow against the linguistic conventions of the target language. As can be seen, foreignization prioritizes the source text’s cultural distinctiveness over the usual pursuit of a smooth and familiar narrative (Venuti, 1995, p. 20). The disruption of fluency thus becomes a vital tool for translatorial agency, compelling the reader to acknowledge the presence of a mediating voice.

Venuti’s call for visibility is both an ethical and ideological intervention, aiming to reclaim the translator’s identity and agency. In his push for visibility, he also challenges the hegemony of dominant discursive conventions. Through foreignizing techniques that explicitly reveal the presence of the other cultures, the reader is constantly reminded of the text’s status while simultaneously adopting a critical stance against the dominant norms of the target culture. Within this framework, Venuti (1995) argues that a fundamental change in our perspective on the role of the translator is also necessary. According to him, translators should be recognized as far more than just linguistic agents; they are, in fact, cultural and ideological agents (1995, pp. 21-22).

Venuti’s ideas have been largely valid, especially for the literary world; however, their applicability in other fields has also been constantly questioned. For instance, Dirk Delabastita (2010, p. 129) in his critical study, “Histories and Utopias”, notes that Venuti’s framework is quite selective. This critique implies that Venuti exclusively focuses on the literary canon, almost entirely excluding all technical forms of translation, including institutional translation. This exclusion, of course, places literature in a privileged position, while ignoring the complexities of non-literary domains. Among those who criticize the logic behind this approach is Anthony Pym (1996), who describes it as a “filter-down theory,” in which elite literary standards are expected to dictate the norms of technical translation, an approach that is ineffective in the institutional field. Many other scholars have also continued to offer different perspectives on the subject. As Kjetil Myskja (2013) notes in his work synthesizing the views of different scholars, such as Mona Baker, Maria Tymoczko, and Michel Cronin, Venuti’s binary model fails to account for the “unpredictability” of foreignization, as the actual effect of a translation is always contingent upon the reader’s specific cultural and political context.

So, the debate on invisibility usually has centered on literary translation. But the mechanisms of invisibility are arguably even more pronounced within institutional translation, which leaves the translator with virtually no room for maneuver. At this point, it is necessary to make a distinction between the invisibility of the translation as a transparent text and the invisibility of the translator as a professional subject, which is the main concern of this study. This distinction is vital for moving beyond the literary field. The reason for the shift in focus can be explained as follows: in the translation of official documents, technical texts, and institutional reports, the translator’s agency is usually limited to the production processes, and decision-

making power rests entirely with institutional actors. This division of labor is essential for maintaining the institution's univocal authority and the stability of its official discourse. Invisibility, in this context, functions as a structural necessity and a fundamental requirement for the unity of institution's discourse. Unlike Venuti's (1995) reading of visibility, the shift in focus in the institutional field is precisely linked to this necessity. Therefore, there is also a difference in the resistance of invisibility. While Venuti (1995) sides with "foreignization" in the context of resistance and criticizes fluency as a form of "ethnocentric violence," Delabastita, on the other hand, reminds us that in professional, administrative, and legal spheres, "immediate intelligibility and the appearance of factuality fulfill vital psychological, relational, cognitive, aesthetic, social, legal or other functions in addition to the ideological ones" (2010, p. 133). In short, within these bureaucratic frameworks, the translator's invisibility is not intended as an act of marginalization, but rather as a conscious institutional policy implemented to maintain the institution's status as the sole authorial voice.

Venuti's approach, therefore, requires a critical adaptation when applied to highly standardized fields like institutional translation. What clearly distinguishes the institutional field from the literary field are the reasons behind invisibility. Institutional frameworks treat anonymity as a prerequisite, imposing it on all employees as a condition of entry to the field. Viewed in this light, there is no individual identity, only employees representing the institution. This observation also finds support in the research of scholars such as Helle V. Dam and Karen Korning Zethsen (2008) and Kaisa Koskinen (2008), who maintain that the dynamics of invisibility operate differently in settings that prioritize consistency, clarity, and functional efficiency. Since individual stylistic intervention is rendered functionally meaningless by these institutional mechanisms, the current discourse on invisibility needs to find a fundamentally new path.

### **Institutional Translation: Descriptions and Key Features**

Institutional translation encompasses any kind of translation that takes place within an institutional setting (Schäffner et al., 2014). This definition, with its unclear boundaries, is quite problematic. Therefore, the first question to ask how we can define an institution without getting lost in abstraction. Ji-Hae Kang (2008, p. 141), who raises the same issue, points out that even the definition of an institution is itself ambiguous, and that almost every translation project is connected to an institution at some stage. This broad scope has shifted the scholarly focus in this field to analyzing the impact of an institution's specific organizational and ideological conditions on the translator, the translation process, and the final form of the text. The present study can also be considered within this scope, given that it deals with a concrete institution.

The answer to the question "what constitutes a translating institution" varies considerably in the literature. Brian Mossop (1988, p. 68), for instance, proposes a comprehensive conceptualization that includes commercial, religious, and governmental entities, such as "corporations, churches, governments, newspapers" (1988, p. 68). On the other hand, Koskinen narrows this scope to official bodies, such as "governmental agencies and local authorities of bilingual or multilingual countries, translating in the European Union, the United Nations and other international or supranational organizations, and international courts of law" (2011, p. 57). This latter approach reflects the prevailing scholarly orientation within translation studies to prioritize clearly defined, concrete institutional structures.

Translations in these settings are extremely standardized. This is due to the conscientious control over content and form necessary to maintain the institution's official discourse. From the micro-level of typography to the macro-level of terminology and tone, the communication policies of the institution shape all internal documents. The very rigidity of this structure lends weight to Mossop's contention that institutional goals dictate the very trajectory of translation decisions. So, the true nature of these texts can only be understood when the strategic question "why it was translated the way it was" is asked, rather than simply "what was translated" (1990, pp. 343-344). Answering this sociological question provides a window into the institution's underlying logic.

In these settings, individual agency is surrendered to institutional uniformity, as translation becomes a strategic tool for organizational survival. Koskinen (2008, p. 22) is particularly attentive to this shift, noting that the translator's role has undergone a fundamental change in this rigid environment. This new role represents a transition from being a creative mediator for an individual author to conveying a message that must perfectly align with institutional identity. This unified nature stands in contrast to literary translation, where the reader seeks a singular authorial voice in a literary work; in an institutional context, any voice the reader hears should be perceived not as an expression of translatorial agency, but as a strategic outcome of institutional policy.

This means that the translation process within an institution is never just a passive transfer, but rather a deliberate act of institutional communication. In this specific context, the status of the institutional translator reflects Venuti's (1995, p. 8) "shadowy existence," a concept introduced in the preceding section. Yet, while Venuti frames this "weird self-annihilation" (1995, p. 8) as an ideological preference in literature, the same situation remains a structural necessity arising from the nature of production in the institutional field. Koskinen (2011, p. 57) explains the basis of this phenomenon by stating that institutions often function as the *de facto* authors of both source and target texts, effectively engaging in a form of organizational self-translation. Through this policy, the institution acquires full ownership of the message, irrespective of the target language. This "self-authoring" (Koskinen, 2011) nature serves to consolidate a singular institutional identity, ensuring that no individual voice challenges the institution's univocal authority.

Rosario Martín Ruano (2020) contests this perception of standardization as neutral procedural routines, and recasts it as a deliberate political strategy instead. Ruano (2020, p. 50) suggests that the impulse for institutional standardization—rooted in what Venuti (1998) calls an "ethics of sameness"—is the fundamental norm that necessitates translator anonymity. This perspective moves the analysis beyond the surface-level goals of quality assurance, identifying translation act as a calculated political act designed to project a unified institutional identity. That is, standardization functions as an ideological scaffolding, which in turn shields the institution's public image. While the institution gains visibility in the outside world, the translator's voice becomes integrated with the institution, ensuring that the institution remains the sole perceived author.

For translators, this singularity policy, in its actual operation, transforms every translational decision into a strategic commitment game. Mossop's observation that even minor "unnecessary changes in meaning are as important as the preserved meaning" (1990, p. 345) serves as a clear example of this analogy. As an institutional translator, his firsthand perspective reveals that any deviations—large or small, stylistic or procedural—that fail to align with the institution's core policies and priorities are explicitly rejected. No matter how fluent or resistant the final text may be, the institutional translator is forced to become invisible not by the text itself, but by the production protocols that deny their individual agency.

Yet, even underneath the weight of these systemic barriers, there is still a subtle opening for translator agency. Institutional translation is, at its core, an inherently collective practice. The act of translation—as Christina Schäffner (2018, p. 206) underscores—relies on the tight synergy between multiple human actors and technological tools, producing a shared output over individual authorship. This collaborative structure, while providing external anonymity by concealing the individual translator's identity from the public, also offers a unique opportunity for participatory agency. Here, translators are no longer passive followers of the rules; instead, they function as the experts who build the institution's linguistic memory. This active engagement generates a distinct form of visibility: one defined not by public appreciation, but by a specialized authority recognized within the organizational hierarchy itself.

### **Forms of Invisibility in the Institutional Field**

With the theoretical foundations now in place, the focus must shift toward the specific mechanisms of designed invisibility that define the institutional translator's reality. The institutional field, in sharp contrast to its literary counterpart, rests on a non-negotiable discursive consistency. This divergence alone confirms that translator invisibility does not function uniformly across all types of translation and varies drastically depending on the field's requirements. The following analysis deconstructs the mechanisms of enforced invisibility, exposing why traditional, literary-centric models result in a theoretical misfit in this context. By establishing the structural logic of this anonymity, the analysis subsequently explores the potential for an alternative form of visibility in such highly regulated environments, as noted earlier.

Let us begin by identifying a core duality within the field: the more vital the translator's presence becomes to the organization's communication needs, the more their individual mark is suppressed to maintain the illusion of a uniform voice. Koskinen (2008, p. 24), pointing to this institutionalized silence, suggests that the translator's overt presence is often eliminated to make the institution more visible, leading to the common practice of omitting the translator's name from texts. This erasure serves a double purpose. It conveys the message that "the institution itself is the speaker," while also creating the impression that "the translation is the text itself" (Koskinen, 2011, p. 58). In this light, the translated work is not a derivative version but the primary, authoritative message of the organization in another language. Every cog in the systemic workflow, from outsourcing to multi-stage revisions, functions this illusion by distributing individual authorship into an

anonymous group. This dynamic, as Kang notes (2009, pp. 142–143), also transforms the translator's role from that of a solitary creator to that of a participant in a routinized, collective practice. The fact that the translator's name is omitted in the final stage reinforces the institution's sole presence, presents the translation as an anonymous institutional product, and gives the reader the impression that the text is identical to the original (Koskinen, 2011, p. 58).

This workflow is technologically mediated, relying on what Koskinen calls “restrictive mechanisms” that have evolved from traditional style guides to sophisticated technological solutions. Today, tools such as translation memories (TM), terminology databases, and computer-aided translation (CAT) software serve as the institution's collective memory, meticulously regulating vocabulary, syntax, and style (Koskinen, 2011, p. 58). The increasing use of machine translation software (MT) in recent years should also be included in the above list. While these mechanisms play a crucial role in ensuring the consistency and speeding up the translator's work, the potential to reduce the translator to a mere technical practitioner is equally concerning.

A theoretical justification for this erasure also becomes evident in the logic of functionalist translation approaches. Basil Hatim (1999, p. 207), for instance, reminds us that the choice between visibility and invisibility should be based on text type and purpose. For “monitoring” texts—that is, texts that are primarily informational and non-evaluative, like a standard report—a domesticating strategy is often the most effective choice. In these cases, creating invisibility ensures a smooth, uninterrupted transfer of information. From this perspective, the functional requirements of most institutional documents inherently necessitate the translator's invisibility. This requirement solidifies anonymity as a core tenet of the organization's broader communication strategy. As Deborah Giustini argues, this “seamless performance” of institutional translation is by no means a natural occurrence. Instead, it is built upon extensive “invisible backstage work” (2024, p. 98). In the institutional context, the translator's ability to remain invisible is a result of what social theorists define as the “mundanity of excellence”. That is, success in the institutional field is often measured by the degree of one's invisibility. This is a sociocultural mechanism where multifaceted expertise is naturalized to the point of being hidden from external eyes (Giustini, 2024, p. 98). Therefore, the invisibility discussed here is not a failure of self-assertion.

Given this institutional obligation for anonymity, conventional models for achieving translator visibility are rendered fundamentally untenable. Koskinen's (2000) tri-level model of textual, paratextual, and extratextual visibility, for instance, proves largely impractical in institutional settings. At the textual level, asserting a unique style is actively avoided, because departing from established linguistic norms is not seen as a mark of creativity, but rather as a sign of poor quality. Paratextual visibility, such as including a translator's name on title page, is equally rare, primarily because the institution retains total ownership of the text. Finally, extratextual visibility through public reviews or discussions is irrelevant, as these types of documents are not publicized in the same way as literary texts (Dam & Ruokonen, 2024, p. 87). Similarly, the “translator-function” proposed by Rosemary Arrojo, (1997, p. 31), where a signature signals the translator's role as a producer of meaning, directly clashes with this bureaucratic reality. This is because this function is deliberately suppressed in the institutional field. It is instead subsumed by what we might call an “institution-function.” This shift ensures that the singular voice of the organization remains absolute, leaving no room for individual signatures or subjective interpretive traces.

On the other hand, even within the confines of standardized language, translators are not entirely deprived of the means to make their presence felt. To navigate this grey area, Dam and Ruokonen's sociological concept of “beyond-textual visibility” (2024) remains central to the discussion. Their work demands a shift in perspective: moving the analysis from the linguistic surface of the text to the translator's “physical, professional, and societal presence” (Dam & Ruokonen, 2024, p. 78). In my analysis of the Directorate, the sub-dimension of “organizational visibility”, which encompasses specifically the translator's presence in institutional records, organizational charts, websites, and linguistic guidelines (Dam & Ruokonen, 2024, p. 81) becomes particularly functional. By also embracing what I have coined as “participatory agency”, these professionals are effectively repositioned. They move from being mere executors of rigid rules to becoming the structural agents of the institution's linguistic infrastructure. They act as active participants who shape internal translation norms. Instead of pushing for an individualistic or utopian demand for stylistic freedom—a goal that is simply unfeasible in this field—these professionals find their power in these structural contributions. The reality is quite clear here: invisibility is indeed a direct result of being excluded from decision-making loop. When translators are treated merely as executors, they are rendered invisible in a functional sense. This active role is what secures their status as indispensable organizational experts.

Fieldwork also tells a more complex story, indicating that professional approaches to visibility are far from uniform. A key example is found in Dam and Ruokonen's empirical study, which reveals that most non-literary translators do not actually desire public fame, prioritizing professional respect from clients and colleagues instead (2024, pp. 88-89). This need for organizational recognition matches the recent conceptualization of Klaus Kaindl (2024), which treats visibility not as a static status, but as a dynamic relationship of social power. So, in this model, the "social dimension" of the work becomes paramount. It is precisely within these internal social networks that the institutional translator exerts a unique influence. Let me pause here to revisit the study's initial premise: the possibility of gaining organizational visibility does not, in any way, contradict the invisibility that I have defended as a structural requirement. These professionals remain societally and textually invisible, even if they achieve a very high level of professional recognition within their own institutional networks. This perspective supports a non-utopian understanding of translatorial agency, achieved by creating the linguistic infrastructure that enables the functioning of the institution. Here, visibility is a matter of structural influence within the organization's private networks.

### **Case Illustration: The Invisibility of Translator in the Translation of EU Acquis**

The Directorate provides an excellent example of how invisibility in the institutional field, which we have so far identified as a structural necessity, is achieved and sustained in practice. The data collected in this section will be examined along two main axes: the technical and linguistic constraints that predetermine translator decisions through guidelines, and the discursive representation of the translator in institutional reports.

In this institution, where legal and administrative translation is carried out, professional autonomy is tightly controlled by a heavy set of prescriptive tools. Among the most important of these are *the Guide* and *the Annex*. In addition to the Turkish version, English, French, and German versions are also available on the institution's official website. These resources not only provide guidance but also create normative constraints by dictating the linguistic and legal parameters for all public institutions and stakeholders involved in the translation of the EU acquis.

*The Guide*, for example, establishes standards on many issues related to EU acts, including general statements, formal features such as font size, spelling and grammar, general templates, writing rules, and equivalents of legal terminology. First, there is a strong control mechanism over terminology. By requiring the use of fixed equivalents for legal acts—such as *tüzük* for "Regulation", *direktif* for "Directive", and specifically *uygulama tüzüğü* for "Implementing Regulation" (the Guide, 2017, Section 3)—the institution ensures terminological consistency. This level of standardization extends far beyond standardized legal terminology, encompassing thousands of specialized technical terms within a centralized glossary. While terminology control in the institutional field is crucial for uniformity and consistency, it leaves no room for the translator's intervention that Venuti (1995) describes. The translator becomes a functional instrument enforcing existing rules, rather than a writer who adds meaning or intervenes stylistically. Absolute control over terminology ensures the institution's ideological and legal continuity. This goes beyond the fluency Venuti (1995) mentions, meaning the complete disappearance of the translator's voice.

The technical details dictated in *the Guide* (2017, Section 2), spanning across procedural formatting and strict formal restrictions, fortify the state of invisibility. By enforcing the rigid document standards, such as the compulsory use of Times New Roman font at 12 pt, single paragraph spacing, and the absence of page numbering, the institution quiets any individual stylistic preference. This process of visual standardization goes far beyond simple regulation. Rather, it completes the transition from personal creation to an institutional product. When the reader looks at these uniform texts, they can only see the signature of the institution, not the translator. In fact, this is the most extreme representation of the issue of fluency that Venuti (1995) stands up to. They are perceived as texts written by the institution itself. And that is precisely the aim.

Beyond these restrictions mentioned above, *the Guide* (2017, Section 6) imposes specific linguistic restrictions that further limit individual style. For instance, splitting sentences is prohibited to ensure faithfulness to the source structure. This restriction completely deprives the translator of the ability to restructure sentences. Even if the resulting phrases are ambiguous, unclear, or do not conform to the target language's structure, the translator is not allowed to intervene. Similarly, when writing dates, one must absolutely remain faithful to the source text. It means that even standard cultural localization is not allowed in this context.

The most striking instruction in *the Guide* (2017, Section 2) is the systematic deletion of the translator's name through a strict File Naming Protocol that necessitates saving documents using only CELEX and language codes (e.g., 31997L0311\_TR) rather than personal names. This naming protocol completes the anonymization process, where the translator's identity is literally archived along with the files. Even within the institution, it is unknown who translated which document, and the translated text becomes an institutional property.

Acting as the technical supplement to the primary *Guide*, *The Annex* (pp. 6-62) contains prescriptive templates that filter out even the smallest prospect of stylistic diversity across regulations and decisions on legislative and non-legislative matters. These templates employed in *The Annex*, instead of merely offering a layout, confine the translator to a linguistic cage where creative intervention becomes nearly impossible. Formulaic expressions are also subject to strict rules, such as "İŞBU TÜZÜK'Ü KABUL ETMİŞTİR:" (HAS ADOPTED THIS REGULATION) (The Annex, p. 8). This uncompromisingly rigid level of control ensures that the legal authority of the text remains consistent across all versions. My intention here is certainly not to question the legitimacy of these rules, but to uncover the systemic mechanisms that produce anonymity, by demonstrating how the translator is rendered invisible within a highly digitized and coded system.

When all these technical parameters are closely examined, it becomes clear that they reveal a broader organizational goal: the complete unification of the institutional voice. Although the guidelines include many more restrictive rules beyond those mentioned above, the examples illustrated are sufficient to understand the basis of invisibility in the institutional field. The provided guidelines describe each step of the translation process in such detail, both linguistically and procedurally, that there is virtually no room for ambiguity requiring the translator's intervention. This is where the translator's voice is practically silenced for the first time.

The invisibility of translators, reinforced by the normative and structural constraints identified in the guidelines, is complemented rhetorically in the institution's activity reports. A review of the Directorate's *2023 Annual Activity Report* (2024) and *2024 Annual Activity Report* (2025) reveals that the Directorate does not dedicate even a single sentence to the translators, who process vast amounts of institutional material every day. In the 2023 report (2024, p. 55), the word "translator" is used only four times, in the context of the "young translators contest" organized by the institution and in relation to online meetings held to contribute to translation training. Similarly, in the 2024 report (2025, p. 55), the word "translator" is mentioned eight times, in the context of the same competition and meetings held at university seminars to contribute to translation training. The institution only makes translators visible when they serve as objects of the public image or subjects of training. Translators, —who perform the primary function within the institution's internal operations— are completely invisible. This absolute silence in the activity reports is the clearest indication that the translator has been rendered completely invisible under the institutional identity.

Another example of institutional invisibility can be observed in the presentation of the TermAB project in the activity reports, an initiative carried out by translators who, with great dedication, have compiled records of 27,000 terms (2024, p. 58; 2025, p. 23). While the institution proudly expresses satisfaction at the emergence of the TermAB database, the translators who create this infrastructure are not mentioned even once in these reports. This conscious silence demonstrates how the institutional field frames translation as an anonymous process. Presenting the database as an institutional achievement without acknowledging the intensive labor and effort behind the scenes allows the institution to maintain its univocal authority.

Although the Directorate's official narratives often describe TermAB as an impersonal or autonomous entity, these large-scale projects function as a distinct platform for visibility. As documented by Ozan Yıldırım and Ayfer Altay (2023, p. 91), this crucial terminological infrastructure is not a static resource, but a dynamic system managed and updated by the institutional translators themselves to ensure legal and linguistic consistency. The visibility gained in this way coincides precisely with what Dam and Ruokonen (2024, p. 83) define as "organizational visibility." Translators play a key role in the creation of databases and internal terminological infrastructure. By constructing the TermAB database, these translators exhibit a kind of participatory agency that provides "beyond-textual visibility" (Dam & Ruokonen, 2024, p. 78). Throughout this process, the institution positions them as indispensable technical authorities, enabling them to achieve a high degree of organizational visibility within the institutional hierarchy. As mentioned earlier, this situation is limited to internal recognition. High organizational visibility mostly coexists with absolute societal invisibility (Dam & Ruokonen, 2024, pp. 81-82). Yet, such a

transition, moving beyond restricted linguistic production to a form of structural agency, calls into question whether traditional frameworks remain viable in these prescriptive environments.

### **Discussion: Is Venuti's Theory Adequate for Institutional Translation?**

Evaluating the relevance of Venuti's (1995) framework to this field demands a careful weighing of the specific conditions, expectations, and principles discussed so far. Traditional approaches such as stylistic intervention, valid in the field of literature but dysfunctional, even incompatible, in an institutional setting, obscure our understanding of the actual professional boundaries and agency available to translators. Even worse, such an approach can easily lead us to conclusions that do not conform to the reality of the field. In my view, an alternative focus, based on the field's own operational conditions, provides a much more realistic perspective on the subject. This allows us to delineate the structural causes of invisibility and understand how translators assert their presence within the established norms of the field.

A quick word of clarification is needed here: Venuti's (1995) theory was primarily developed for the Anglo-American literary market. He does not, by extension, claim a universal theory for all fields of translation. Nevertheless, as his ethical paradigm has influenced much of the scholarship in Translation Studies, it has become the default criterion by which all translator agency is assessed. This conceptual friction is intensified when his framework is transferred to the institutional settings without critical evaluation. In an environment defined by collective identity, invisibility is far from a stylistic intervention that can be overturned through resistance; it is a non-negotiable structural requirement. Therefore, moving beyond Venuti's (1995) call for foreignization, we must prioritize an analysis of the conditions that make anonymity an operational necessity.

When examined through this alternative lens, the Directorate's insistence on communicative control appears to go beyond a simple quest for hierarchical power. Its strict protocols emerge as a necessary strategic policy to sustain a cohesive and strong institutional image across global platforms. The high-risk nature of the translated texts also justifies this insistence. Indeed, documents translated within the institution carry immense legal weight, particularly regarding the EU *acquis*. Translators are tasked with a level of meticulousness that leaves no room for error or ambiguity, as these documents directly affect people's social and legal rights. Under these conditions, the institution's oversight, control, and adherence to such strict protocols through various means are a fundamental survival strategy, not a choice.

In practice, however, the task of maintaining this unified identity rests primarily on the shoulders of the translators, who communicate on behalf of the institution. It is this fundamental task that makes Venuti's (1995, p. 20) proposed foreignization solution a structural impossibility in these settings. Translators working in the rigid bureaucracy of the Directorate are not afforded the space to assert their translatorial agency. More importantly, these professionals enter this environment with a clear understanding of its boundaries, fully aware that their individual voices will be muffled. They act knowing that attempts at stylistic deviation carry professional risks. After all, the primary duty of an institutional translator is to reflect the institution's image, not their own. Invisibility, therefore, emerges as a consciously designed phenomenon, maintained through organizational norms and procedural constraints with the consent of the translators themselves.

This sensitivity to stylistic deviation is not driven by a desire to eliminate the foreignness of the source culture, but to reflect the uniform authority of the institution. The invisibility demanded in the field can also be seen as a direct extension of the domesticating norms that Venuti (1998, 2005) identifies as a tradition aimed at flattening textual production. In Ruano's (2020, p. 50) words, this "ethics of sameness" acts as a pervasive force within the institutional system, imposing an ideal of transparency that neutralizes individual subjectivity. By reducing translation to a mechanical standardization, the institution is essentially devaluing the cognitive labor involved in the process. It is exactly at this point that a deep paradox comes to light. This forced loss of identity, though marketed as transparency, also serves to obscure the translator's expert role in the linguistic infrastructure. This erasure reflects the change noted by Ruano (2020, p. 49), where translation is downgraded to a "constraint"—a time-consuming and costly necessity—ultimately stripping the translator of their expert status and leaving them—as expressed by the institutional translators themselves in Koskinen's (2008, p. 151) ethnographic study—relegated to the precarious position of a "necessary evil."

This difference in the logic of invisibility also raises questions about the forms in which ethical resistance manifests across different fields. Within an institutional context, the main issue to be discussed should not be the resistance itself to the

specific mechanisms through which agency is deployed. Because in such environments that demand invisibility as a prerequisite, visibility is coded not as a professional virtue, but as a potential disruption—an obstacle to the necessary stability of the discourse. My analysis of *the Guide and the Annex* also confirms this; translators are bound by numerous technical and formal instructions that preclude even the slightest exercise of agency. These professionals function not as creative authors in a romantic sense, but as technical experts responsible for the execution of a pre-defined discourse. To escape this theoretical deadlock, we must look beyond the textual focus. Adopting a broader “spectrum of visibilities” (Freeth & Treviño, 2024) is the only viable way to overcome this impasse.

Surprisingly, even within such a constrained institution, certain spaces remain that permit a degree of translator visibility. The TermAB terminology database, mentioned in the case study section, represents a translator-led project that can emerge as a distinct phenomenon within the aforementioned “spectrum of visibilities” (Freeth & Treviño, 2024). Even though the translators are not explicitly credited as the architects of this database in these reports, they gain a new level of internal recognition. This contribution is now being documented within scholarly discourse (Yıldırım & Altay, 2023). Since the institution depends on translators to build its language infrastructure, a unique space arises for translator agency. Indeed, this may be the only place where they can truly maintain their professional authority. Therefore, the greatest loss stems not from the inherent invisibility they accept from the outset, but from the exclusion of translators from these decision-making processes; this exclusion prevents them from acting as structural representatives of the institutional voice. Without this involvement, the only visibility they might achieve remains out of reach.

The institutional field, thus, necessitates a shift towards a participatory agency that secures “organizational visibility” (Dam & Ruokonen, 2024, p. 83). Far from being a threat to the unified authority of the institution, this visibility emerges through large-scale projects. At this point, it is essential to untangle the subtle boundary between professional visibility and organizational visibility. Dam and Ruokonen define the former as an internal subjective sense of belonging to the workplace, while the latter—organizational visibility—is the concrete, formal recognition of the translator’s role within the institution’s structural and linguistic hierarchy (2024, p. 80). In my analysis, this distinction is not only theoretical but also evidenced by the TermAB database. Recently integrated into the Turkish e-government (e-devlet) platform, the database is more than a mere technical tool; it is a definitive milestone of participatory agency, enabling institutional translators to leverage their expert authority by building the terminological infrastructure.

This internal recognition should not be perceived as the disappearance of the study’s core premise. The institutional translator remains, by and large, publicly anonymous and textually effaced. While projects like TermAB secure a high degree of “organizational visibility” (Dam & Ruokonen, 2024, p. 83), this fails to manifest itself in the form of visibility discussed by Venuti (1995). What we are witnessing here is the repositioning of the translator. They have shifted from being the mere followers of the structural norms to becoming the sophisticated engineers building the institutional wall. Their power, therefore, lies not in dismantling the structural wall of invisibility, but in their capacity to meticulously build the very linguistic framework that enables the institution’s univocal authority.

Ultimately, the evidence from the guidelines and activity reports indicates that the traditional paradigm of invisibility lacks the analytical depth necessary to explain institutional contexts. Therefore, invisibility in institutional translation should be re-envisioned not as a state of being ignored, as Venuti (1995) discusses in a literary context, but as a deliberate structural outcome. By remaining unseen, the translator allows the institution to speak with a singular and authoritative voice, ensuring that the message remains untainted by individual agency. Such a paradigm shift necessitates a radical reframing. Invisibility can no longer be measured against simplistic binaries of resistance and submission, nor on a reductionist presence-absence axis. Instead, it must be interrogated as a deliberately designed structural phenomenon. By deconstructing its organizational roots and systemic implications, we can finally achieve a better understanding of the actual standing of the institutional translator. Recognizing the translator not simply as a passive practitioner immersed in the text, but as a structural agent of linguistic infrastructure, allows the discipline to progress towards a more nuanced ethics of visibility that takes into account the realities of the institutional field.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study theoretically discussed Venuti's concept of invisibility in the context of translator invisibility in the institutional field. The starting point of the study was that in institutional translation, unlike what Venuti discusses in a literary context, invisibility is not a stylistic choice but a structural necessity for the functioning of the system. As a case illustration, the translation guidelines and activity reports of the Directorate were examined using qualitative document analysis and discourse analysis methods. In this context, the concept was re-examined as a consciously designed phenomenon through organizational norms and procedural constraints.

As a result of this examination, it was observed that both *the Guide* and *the Annex* contained numerous instructions that defined formal and discursive boundaries, ranging from terminology to the writing style, and left no room for even the slightest intervention in the translation. The most striking was the Name Filing Protocol, which stipulated that the translator's name should not be included in any file; instead, numbers and symbols should be used. In addition to these guidelines, it was observed that the institutional translators were completely ignored in the institution's activity reports. The concept research conducted regarding the TermAb project revealed that while detailed information about the project was provided, the names of the translators who carried out this comprehensive project were not mentioned even once. More importantly, when the keyword "translator" was searched using the same method, it was found that the term was not mentioned in relation to staff; it appeared only in the context of the "young translators contest" organized by the institution and the university seminars the institution attended to contribute to translation training. These results confirm our initial assumption that the translator's invisibility is a structural necessity and reveal the existence of invisibility in both technical and discursive dimensions.

While invisibility is an inevitable outcome since the process is controlled through various mechanisms, this does not imply a total disappearance of agency. However, the most fundamental question here is where to look for this space, within the context of this particular institution. The answer is that translatorial agency should be sought not in the text, but "beyond" it, and manifested through "participatory agency"—an expert-focused influence on the norms, guidelines, and databases that constitute the institutional voice. A prime example of this is the TermAB database, which is developed and maintained by in-house translators, allowing them to gain "organizational visibility" through "participatory agency". Yet, as this study shows, this visibility is not projected externally to maintain the institution's unified voice. Even if translators gain internal recognition, they remain an anonymous structural element, indispensable to the system but with no visibility outside the institution.

The findings of this study, focusing on an institution tasked with legal and administrative translation, are considered applicable to other highly regulated settings, including national and international organizations, where maintaining a univocal institutional voice is a structural prerequisite. Given that institutions' translation policies may differ, at least in the strictness of their instructions, further empirical and ethnographic research is needed to support the argument that invisibility is a structural necessity. A multi-layered theory of translator invisibility, encompassing a "beyond textual" framework that goes beyond textual analysis, should be rigorously tested across various fields of translation.

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