

The Use of Adaptation in Literary Translation as a Strategy for Solving the Cultural Dilemma

Analysis of Three Selected Translations of The Prophet

استخدام التكيف في الترجمة الأدبية كإستراتيجية لحل المعضلة الثقافية

تحليل ثلاث ترجمات مختارة لكتاب "النبي"

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Abstract:

This study investigates the use of adaptation as a significant technique in literary translation, with a particular focus on comparing three translations of Kahlil Gibran's poetic-prose literary work *The Prophet* published in English in 1923. The Arabic selected translations are Mikhael Naimy's (1956), Tharwat Okasha's (1959), and Yusuf Al-Khal's (1968). Drawing on theoretical perspectives from Newmark, Nida, and Taber, Shi, and others, the research highlights adaptation as an inevitable process in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps. Four main types of adaptation are examined—collocational, cultural, literary, and ideological—through comparative analysis of selected passages. The study provides analytical examples from the selected texts, followed by one or more suggested translations. The study demonstrates how each translator navigated challenges related to cultural references, religious sensitivities, and stylistic differences, and how their linguistic and ideological backgrounds shaped their translation choices. The findings underscore that adaptation is not merely a compensatory strategy but a creative and context-sensitive technique that ensures cultural resonance and readability for the target audience.

Keywords: Adaptation, Literary Translation, Cultural Equivalence, Types of Adaptation, *The Prophet*.

1- دكتوراه في اللغويات والترجمة

Introduction:

The field of literary translation serves as a bridge that connects diverse cultures, languages, and literary traditions. At its core lies the challenging task of faithfully conveying a text's essence and literary beauty from one language to another. One crucial technique a literary translator employs is adaptation, which involves carefully striking a balance between fidelity to the source text and the need to make the translated work accessible and relatable to its target audience. This paper delves into the concept of adaptation in literary translation, exploring the various techniques translators employ to ensure that the spirit and impact of the original work are preserved.

Of course, complete faithfulness cannot be achieved 100% in translation; that is why translators resort to using the technique of adaptation. This research attempts to investigate why adaptation is frequently needed and also enumerates the types of adaptation translators make in their translations, supported by some selected examples of the three translations under study.

Newmark (1995), in his definition, focuses on translating the author's intention. He defines translation as "rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text". But Nida and Taber (1982), in their definition, focus on the meaning and style and use the term "reproduction" to indicate the process of translation. To quote them: "Translation is the reproduction in a receptor language of the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning, and secondly in terms of style. Shi (2003), a Chinese translation theorist, assures that communicative translation needs what he calls "accommodation," which involves making several changes that are needed for the target text to be in line with the essence of the source text. To quote him: "We believe

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translation is not merely linguistic conversion or transformation between languages, but it involves accommodation in the scope of culture, politics, aesthetics, and many other factors". Though each previous definition refers to the process of translation from a different dilemma, all of them agree that the process, in one way or another, involves several changes.

According to Landers (2001), sometimes, adaptation is considered a kind of challenge as it requires more flexibility and creativity to produce a text suitable for the target audience. Not only does the translator deal with words, but with ideas and cultures as well, so, he/she has to be acquainted with the culture and vocabulary of the target language to produce a qualified translation. Adaptation as a literary translation technique has different modes, as Baker and Saldanha (2009) indicate, such as transcription of the original, omission, expansion, updating, situational or cultural adequacy, and creation.

Creation mode of adaptation: in this mode the translator resorts to change the source text and replaces it with another to help the target readers get the intended meaning of the source text according to their culture, at the same time it has the main message and idea of the original one.

"I hope nothing's wrong" is translated as "كفى الله الشر"

In Egyptian culture, the expression "كفى الله الشر" is used to express a hope that nothing bad or wrong will happen. To convey that meaning to the target readers, the translator employs a creative mode of adaptation to help them understand the expression.

Congratulation is translated as ألف نهار أبيض

In Egyptian culture, there are many expressions used for congratulation, and the expression "ألف نهار أبيض" is one of them. Since there is no equivalent for that Arabic expression in the English language, the

translator employs a creative mode of adaptation to convey the intended meaning in the source text, which expresses congratulation, to the target readers.

Hello! Is anybody there? Translated as يا أهل الله

In Arabic language and culture, the expression “يا أهل الله” is considered a type of greeting and a question about whether someone is in the place or not. The translator conveys that meaning to the target readers and indicates to them the significance of the greeting that the expression bears through employing the phrase.

Types of Adaptation:

There are four basic types of adaptation: collocation adaptation, cultural adaptation, literary adaptation, and ideological adaptation.

Collocation Adaptation:

It is known that collocation is a difficult factor for anyone learning a foreign language. There seems to be no reason for certain collocations. Regular dictionaries are of little help in translating collocations; thus, the translator often has to resort to adaptation. For example, the verb perform is used with (collocates with) operation, but not with discussion. So, we say: (The doctor operated) but we cannot say (The committee performed a discussion) since held or had not been “performed” collocates with discussion. Consequently, we say (The committee held/had a discussion). Another example, the English phrase (dry cow), which is correctly rendered in Arabic as (The cow which stopped providing milk) because literal translation (*baqaraton gafaton*) would perplex the target language receptor (here, the one who speaks Arabic), causing communication to fail. One more thing, whenever both the source language and the target language belong to

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different families of languages, such as English and Arabic, the reliance on adaptation increases and vice versa.

Cultural Adaptation:

A translator should be both bicultural and bilingual. That means he/she is the bridge not only between two languages but also between two cultures. In other words, a translator must take into his/her account the target text culture as well as the target text structure. One of the most common strategies for doing such a thing is applying the techniques of adaptation. To make the point clear, the Arab national character, by their nature and culture, do not speak directly, unlike the Westerner who speaks openly and directly. A translator or even an interpreter should consider this while translating or interpreting from English into Arabic or vice versa. Otherwise, there will be what is called a cultural shock. In addition to this, it might be stated that a dispraise in one culture can be a praise in another. To make the point clearer, a funny example might be given, when someone who belongs to a different culture once said, “Your mother is a cow!!!!!!” Initially, this was irritating and shocking, as the names of animals, in general, and cows in particular, in Arabic culture are often used to disparage people. But, then, it is recognized that he didn’t mean it, but he meant to praise the mother for her good education. The speaker is Hindu. It’s well-known that in Hindu culture, Cows are holy and dignified.

Literary Adaptation:

This type of adaptation is found in translating some literary works, such as novels, short stories, drama, or poetry. Here, the translator has taken into consideration the cultural divergence while translating a piece of literature from one language into another. For example, translating the title of Hemingway's masterpiece *The Old Man and the Sea* into Arabic like: الشيخ (البحر) *alsheikh wa al bahr* (*The Sheikh and the Sea*) Rather than the literal conversion: (العجوز والبحر) *(al'gooz wa al bahr)*, while the former term (*sheikh*) in Arabic indicates many dimensions of the protagonist Santiago, the old man, such as experience, faith, determination, and backbone, the latter (old) does not cover all these dimensions but refers only to old age. The same for poetry, though poetry is believed to be untranslatable. The old Romans indicate that a translator is a traitor in poetry. Al-Jahiz once stated that rendering poetry is not allowed. All translation theorists agree that poetry is technically untranslatable. But adaptation can offer help in this aspect, and is of paramount significance. Literary adaptation becomes a skill instead of a basic requirement. A good poetry translator instinctively knows the difference between the aesthetic traditions of different cultures, so his/her translation can be better appreciated by the target reader and can achieve the required effect. Otherwise, the translation is doomed to be a failure, no matter how close or similar it looks to the original.

Ideological Adaptation:

Ideological Adaptation in translation is related to sexual and religious concerns. Most Arabs, even today, are conservative in dealing with sexual and religious concerns. They avoid the topics of sex, if you do not, you will be regarded immoral, dishonest, unreliable and simply bad. In translation, we, as translators, either omit or abbreviate the original sex scene of the source text. Translators often edit the language or the scene, or make it implicit instead. In English-Arabic translation, the translator would always make adaptations to soften the original tone, hoping not to offend the target text readers as well as to escape censorship. For example, a foreign magazine occasionally carries offensive topics against any religious topics or political or racial issues. Some might say no need to translate them at all, others are on the opposite side and say a translator should translate everything in detail honestly without hiding anything, simply because this is his / her job which is to express others' opinions not his / her own. If the first opinion is to be followed and never translated such writings, then we shall not be able to reply against the aggressive writings, and in case the second opinion to be followed which is to translate everything in detail, this may offend the target receptors and may lead into a religious or political conflict; while adaptation stands in the middle area between both choices.

Moreover, adaptation is the major technique used in solving the cultural and religious dilemmas, it is used in crossing and bridging any cultural or religious dilemma. Vinay and Darlenet suggest that it is a particular type of equivalence (V. & D., 1958, 32) because adaptation is equivalence in a position between the SL and TL. It is used when the translator faces a challenge in translation and he is supposed to express a

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particular notion or issue that is acceptable in one culture (the prototext) but is taboo or not acceptable in the metatext (the receptor's culture). In this case, the translator alters the text to conform to the TL culture or employs euphemism when necessary.

Translator's Adaptation:

In the light of this supposition, Al-manna also notes that the Target Text is considered here as the outcome of a process in which translators deploy their efforts to comply with the limitations imposed on them and, in this way, adopt what they believe to be an acceptable standard. Additionally, religion and culture are significant factors in every language and society; they have a wide-ranging and profound influence on the language used for social interaction as well as in the practice of translation. In addition to the earlier factors, which put the emphasis on the translator's abilities and qualifications to produce a high-quality translation, the effect of culture and religion are also of great importance on the process of translation.

Cultural Belonging: Adaptations as a means of solving the cultural and religious translation dilemmas:

Due to the translators' unique cultural identities and theological backgrounds, Niamey, Okasha, and Al Khal had diverse approaches to translating *The Prophet*, which has many examples of adaptation as a means of solving a cultural challenge that may face the translator. *The Prophet* is a book with a 'Sufi' nature and preaching style, without ignoring the fact that Gibran is Christian and that most of his translators who translated *The Prophet* are Christians too. This, in turn, gave both the book and its translations a special nature and felt more like the

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Christian Bible in its terms, which has many expressions that are close to the Old Testament and the New Testament in portraying man's relation to God, nature, and mankind. Only Tharwat Okasha is the Muslim translator who translates for a Muslim audience, which led him to use the adaptation technique in his translation.

It is found that the three translators' resort to adaptation in three topics:

- An Adaptation concerns the concept of "God"
- An Adaptation concerns "ethics"
- An Adaptation concerns "rituals"

Analytical Examples of an adaptation about the concept of "God":

God rests in reason, God moves in passion	
Translator	Translation
Naimy	إن الله يسرّح في العقل إن الله يتحرك في الهوى
Okasha	...إن روح الله تسكن في العقل إن روح الله تموج في العاطفة
Al Khal	الله يتحرك في الهوى... الله يهدأ في العقل
A suggested translation	نعرف الله بالعقل ونستشعره بالقلب

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A quick view of the three versions is enough for the reader to know that the translators (Naimy and al -Khal) are Christians and that their commitment to the prototext comes from their doctrine. On the other hand, Okasha adapts his translation to be acceptable in the Islam doctrine as he did in translating "God" to "روح الله" and "rest" to "تسكن" because it is not acceptable to gather the name of "God" in the same context with units like "passion" which indicates a secular connotation. Hence. Okasha translated it into "الهوى" not "العاطفة"

Naimy's translation is literal. Based on Naimy's religious background, it is shown that his Christian doctrine is reflected in his translation, portraying 'God' as a human being that 'rests' and 'moves' as the concept of 'incarnation' is well-known in Christian culture. While Okasha, as a Muslim, resorted to the Quranic verse "روح الله"

"ولا تياسوا من روح الله "

"إنما المسيح عيسى بن مريم رسول الله وكلمته وألقاها إلى مريم وروح منه "

It is noted also that Al-Khal and Naimy translated the following example literally while Okasha did not

God listen not to your words save when he himself utters them through your lips.	
Translator	Translation
Naimy	والله لا يصغى إلى ما تقولون إلا إذا قاله هو نفسه بشفاهم
Okasha	فإن الله لا يستمع إلى كلماتكم إلا إذا أجزاها هو على شفاهم
Al-Khal	فإن الله لا يستمع إلى كلماتكم إلا إذا أجزاها هو على شفاهم
A suggested translation	ليس لله سماع في قولك إلا إذا كان صوته هو المتجلى في الفاظك

It is noted that Al-Khal and Okasha's translations denote an absolute entire destiny, while Naimy 's translation is more of a Sufi vision, indicating the unity of the creation with its creator. On another occasion, Okasha made a slight adaptation in the sentence to suit the Muslim's mind who believes that "God" is not a speaker, he is the one and only "الكليم"

ليس كمثله شئ وهو السميع البصير

Ditto comes in the following example:

Through the hands of such as these God Speaks	
Translator	Translation
Naimy	بأيدي أولئك وأمثالهم يتكلم الله -
Okasha	على فيض أمثال هؤلاء تتجلى كلمة الله -
Al-Khal	على أيدي أمثال هؤلاء يتكلم الله -
Suggested Translations	<p>وبأيديهم تنعكس- تتجلى كلمة الله -</p> <p>يجري الله كلماته على الألسنة بسبب هؤلاء -</p> <p>يجري الله كلماته بمثل أيادي هؤلاء -</p>

In Muslim doctrine, it is not acceptable to relate God's talks to things that are concrete which explains why Okasha did not translate "hands" into "أيدي" and did not also translate the rest of the sentence literally. The idea of giving human characteristics to God is somehow acceptable in the Christian belief while it is not in the Muslim doctrine. The same idea is applied in the following example:

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Aye, you shall be together ever in the silent memory of God.	
Translator	Translation
Naimy	أجل، وستكونون معا حتى في صمت ذاكرة الله
Okasha	أجل، كذلك تظللان معا، في سر الله المكنون
Al- Khal	بلى ، وتكونون معا حتى في ذكرى الله الصامتة
A suggested Translation	نعم، ستجتمعان إلى الأبد في أسرار الله

What is noted about al-Khal and Naimy's translations is that they have 'no sense'. They both stick to the literal translation word by word, no effort to convey the meaning behind the text as a unit. They deal with each word as a separate unit. While if there is a necessity to translate "God" in its real name, Okasha translates it into "رب" as in the following example:

Who has the free-hearted earth for mother, and God for father	
Translator	Translation
Naimy	وهو الذي أمه الأرض السخية الفواد، وأبوه الله
Okasha	في حين الأرض السمحاء أمه والرب أبوه
Al Khal	وهو الذي أمه الأرض السمحاء ، وأبوه الله
A suggested translation	- من لديه الأرض الحرة القلب أمًا، والرب ابا - من لديه الأرض الحرة القلب كأم، والله كآب -الذي له الأرض الطيبة الأم، والرب الأب

The explanation here is that the word " رب " has secular meaning and does not only denote Godship. In Arabic language uses there are:

رب العمل)/(رب الأسرة – رب الدار

And their feminine ones like

(ربات الجمال- ربات البيوت - ربة المنزل)

It is used with an additional article when it means

القيم/المربي/المدير / السيد/الملك / المنعم

And without any article only when it means "God " الرب " and when used for other notions, it has an additional name "رب" *lesan al Arab*. Okasha used it without the definite article, like in the upcoming

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example:

Our God, who art our winged self	
Translator	Translation
Naimy	يا إلهنا الذى هو ذاتنا المجنحة
Okasha	ربنا يا روحنا ترفرف علينا من سمانك
Al Khal	إلهنا الذى هو ذاتنا المجنحة
A suggested translation	يا إلهنا، يا من تجليت فينا نفساً ذات جناحين، ترفعنا من ثقل الأرض إلى فسحات السماء

Okasha adapted in translating 'winged self ' because it does not make sense to add a feature like wings to God. Furthermore, Okasha adds a Godship characteristic when it is needed, like in:

am I harp that the hand of the mighty may touch me	
Translator	Translation
Naimy	ألعنى قيثار تلمس أوتارها أصابع القدير
Okasha	ليتنى كنت قيثاراً فتمسنى يد العلى القدير

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Al- Khal	أأكون قيثاره فتلمسنى يد القدير
Suggested translations	<p>- أأنا قيثارة لا حياة لها إلا إذا مستها يد القادر؟</p> <p>- أفأنا وتر صامت، لا يفيض بصوته إلا إذا مسته يد الجبار</p> <p>- أفأنا آلة ساكنة لا تنهض بمعناها إلا إذا أجرى القدر أنامله عليها؟</p>

The same adaptation technique is applied to the next example:

For his hand, though heavy and hand, is guided by the tender hand of the unseen	
Translator	Translation
Naimy	لأن يده وإن بدت ثقيلة وقاسية , فإنما تصاوع فيما تعمل يد القدرة التى لا تدرك ولا تبصر
Okasha	فإن يده وإن بدت ثقيلة خشنة , لتهديدها يد حانية لا يرى صاحبها الأعلى
Al Khal	لأن يده ولو كانت ثقيلة وقاسية تقودها يد اللامنظور الحانية
A suggested translation	لأن يده، رغم ثقلها وقوتها، توجهه اليد الرقيقة للغيب

As it is not acceptable to give a metaphoric image to God, the same is in giving a godship feature to mankind, like in the following example:

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Like the ocean is your God-self	
Translator	Translation
Naimy	كالمحيط هي ذاتكم الربانية
Okasha	إن ذاتكم النورانية كالبحر المحيط
Al-Khal	كالبحر هي ذاتكم الإلهية
A Suggested translation	- باتساع النهر تكون روحكم حرة - كمثل إتساع المحيط حرة سريرتكم

The second adaptation technique used by Okasha concerns ethics:

The silence of aloneness reveals to their eyes their naked selves and they would escape	
Translator	Translation
Naimy	لأن سكينه الوحدة تكشف لأبصارهم ذواتهم العارية ولذلك يلوذون بالهرب
Okasha	لأن سكوت الوحدة يكشف لأعينهم خفايا أنفسهم فيفرون
Al -Khal	فصمت الوحشة يفضح أمام عيونهم عرى ذواتهم فيهربون
Suggested Translation	صمت الوحدة ينعكس على أعينهم وتتعري أرواحهم نحو الفرار

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The image of "naked selves" may be a little bit embarrassing for Muslims, so Okasha substitutes it with "خفايا أنفسهم". In this way, Okasha avoided all that is unethical or does not match the SL cultural code, as in the following example: The same thing is noted in the following example in which, Okasha made two adaptations:

If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide to the body of life.	
Translat or	Translation
Naimy	إذا كنتم تريدون حقا أن تبصروا روح الموت فافتحوا أبواب قلوبكم على جسد الحياة
Okasha	وإذا شئتم حقا أن تشاهدوا روح الموت فافتحوا قلوبكم واسعة لجسد الحياة
Al-Khal	وإذا شئتم حقا أن تشاهدوا روح الموت فافتحوا قلوبكم واسعة لجسد الحياة
A Suggested Translation	فإن أردتم حقا أن تبصروا روح الموت ' فليوسع قلوبكم لجسد الحياة

Okasha made his first adaptation in the phrase 'the spirit of death ', which he turned to be " كنه الموت ". This is due to the lack of eloquence in the original expression, as death has no spirit actually, but it is more like letting (setting) the spirit free (go). The second adaptation is in exchanging the body with كيان to give the text a touch of spirituality.

The Third type of adaptation concerns Rituals:

And that pain is their baptism	
Translator	Translation
Naimy	فالمهم هو المعمودية لهم
Okasha	وفى الألم تطهير لنفسه
Al-Khal	وهذه الحسرة هي معمديته
A suggested translation	وَأَنَّ أَلَامَهُمْ هِيَ مَعْمُودِيَّتُهُمْ

Baptism is a Christian ritual and is one of the prior vital Christian religion secrets in which the newborn baby is showered with water with the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and then he becomes officially Christian. The origin of the word *العمد* is *ALBALAL'* | being wet. On the other hand, these rituals do not exist in the Muslim doctrine, so Okasha substitutes this ritual with another, which is known to Muslims as 'Purity', which is repeated in the following example:

And the white handed is not clean in the doing of the felon	
Translator	Translation
Naimy	ولا أبيض اليدين غير ملوث بفجارة المجرم
Okasha	وطاهر اليدين لا ينجو من رجس الأثيم
Al khal	ولا أبيض اليد نظيفا في ما يصنعه الأثيم
Suggested Translations	- ونظيف اليدين ليس برينا من أفعال المجرم - و البرئ ليس بناجيا من أفعال المجرم - لن تنجو الأيادي البيضاء من تلطيخ الأثمين

Though the white handed generally denotes purity and goodness, blessings and benevolence, the cleansing of defects. *Lesan al Arab* defines white-handed with evidence as "the hand that gives without asking and doesn't remind of favors. Okasha preferred to translate into "طاهر اليدين" to achieve contrast and to show the discrepancy between "cleanliness" and "guilt" and that they are terms so much related to rituals. Rituals in Islam also do not accept the idea that one comes to pray laughing, as in the next example:

Until you shall come laughing	
Translator	Translation
Naimy	حتى تنتهوا منها ضاحكين
Okasha	حتى تأتوا إلى الصلاة متهللين
Al-Khal	حتى تعودوا ضاحكين
A Suggested Translation	حتى تأتوا إليها فرحين

Okasha chooses the adjective "تهليل" from "إهلال" which means raising voice with acclamation, like when saying "لا إله إلا الله". The same issue concerning prayers comes in the following example:

And then to sleep with a prayer for the beloved in your heart	
Translator	Translation
Naimy	ثم أن تأووا إلى أسرتكم في قلوبكم صلاة من أجل من تحبون
Okasha	ثم تخذل إلى النوم وقلبك يسبح بمن تهوى
Al-Khal	ثم أن تنام وفي قلبك صلاه لمن تحب
A Suggested Translation	ثم تخذل إلى النوم وقلبك ملى بالدعاء لمن تحب

'Prayer' in Christianity is rehearsing some excerpts from *Al-Injiil* on different occasions without a certain time like the case in Islam, where prayers are five specific times. It is a concept more like prayers that is the actual core of the act "praying" and also bears the meaning of 'praise', and this is the meaning which Okasha goes for in his translation because prayers are related in the Muslim mind to the five times per day.

Another example that shows Gibran's tendency to the Holy Book, atendency that is very clear in Al-Khal and Niamey's translation, while it is not in Okasha's version. This tendency is very clear in the following example:

What judgment pronounces you upon him who though honest in the flesh yet is a thief in spirit?	
Translator	Translation
Naimy	أى حكم عساكم تصدرون على من كان شريفا بالجسد ولصا بالروح ؟
Okasha	وأى حكم تصدرون على من برئ جسده وأثمت سريرته؟
Al-Khal	أى حكم تصدرونه على من كان صادق في البدن لكنه سارق في الروح؟
A suggested Translation	وأى أحكام تصدرون بشأنه بالرغم من كونه سارقا للروح ،بريء الجسد بم تحكمون على من طهر جسده وتدنست روحه

judgment pronounces you upon him who, though honest in the flesh, is a thief in spirit?

These expressions are taken from (Matthew XXVI 41), especially the spiritual units "spirit and flesh" as in "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak". So, Okasha is not restricted to the original text, but he resorted to adaptation because it is far from the culture and beliefs of his audience.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the three Arabic translations of Gibran's *The Prophet* illustrates the indispensable role of adaptation in literary translation. While literal translation may preserve surface meaning, it often risks cultural dissonance and aesthetic loss. Adaptation, by contrast, enables translators to negotiate between fidelity to the source text and the cultural and ideological expectations of the target readership. The study shows that adaptation can take multiple forms—whether collocational, cultural, literary, or ideological—each serving to reconcile differences in linguistic norms, religious sensitivities, and literary traditions. Furthermore, the findings affirm that translators' backgrounds and cultural affiliations significantly inform their adaptation strategies, leading to diverse yet equally legitimate interpretations of the same text. Ultimately, adaptation emerges as a creative and necessary practice that not only resolves translation dilemmas but also enriches the literary dialogue between languages and cultures.

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