Readers' Perception of Overt and Covert Translation in the Translation of Novels: A Case of the English Translation of Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*

Randa Kullab, Universiti Malaya
Ali Jalalian Daghigh, Universiti Malaya

Abstract

Readers' expectations of quality play a significant role in the success of a translation. However, studies assessing the translation quality of literary texts in view of Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) models have paid scant attention to these expectations. In response to this gap in knowledge, the present study empirically examined readers' preferences regarding translation quality in view of House's (2015) prescription of overt translation for works written by renowned authors and explored the reasons behind these preferences. The study initially applied House's (2015) TQA tools to determine whether two different translations of Naguib Mahfouz's Midaq Alley *– one by Le Gassik (1975) and the other by Davis (2011) – showed any overt or covert translation tendencies, and then interviewed 20 American readers. The findings revealed that while some of the participants preferred overt translation, citing reasons including a desire to engage with the original culture and a need to access the authentic meaning and style of the original text, others preferred covert translation, as they expected naturalness and creativity. This study provides valuable insights for translators and translation scholars, enhancing our understanding of the relationship between translation typologies and readers' reception.*

Keywords: *Translation Quality Assessment, overt translation, covert translation, literary translation, reception, Midaq Alley*

1. Introduction

The West has shown an increasing interest in Arabic literature, specifically after the renowned Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz received his Nobel Prize in 1988 (Al-Toma 2005: 29; Tresilian 2008: 18). The number of Arabic literary works translated into English increased from 66 between 1966 and 1988 to 288 between 1988 and 2008 (Al-Khawaja 2014: 197). Among Mahfouz's writings, the novel *Midaq Alley* (1947) has been the most influential. It has attracted Western readers, especially in the U.S. (Khalifa 2020: 5), where it has been translated three times by American publishers (the first two translations were by Le Gassik in 1966 and 1975, and the third and most recent was by Davis in 2011 which was also adapted into the American-Mexican movie *The Alley of Miracles.* One challenging aspect of literary translation is that literary works embody not only the language of the original but also its culture, history, and traditions (Hyde 1991: 39; Kuleli 2020: 619; Alhamshary 2021: 140). Thus, to guarantee that such literary works are well transferred into the target language (TL), their translation quality should be maintained, especially in the case of literary works written by significant authors who are considered assets in their own cultures (House 2015: 59).

The attempts that have been made to assess the translation quality of Arabic literary texts in general (e.g. Hassan 2015), and Mahfouz's work in particular (e.g. Aladwan 2011; El-

Zawawy 2019), have been through applying functional Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) models, including those developed by Nord (1991) and House (1997). Besides, House's (1997, 2015) TQA models have been applied to assess the translation quality of literary texts in different languages (e.g. Kargarzadeh & Paziresh 2017; Naidj & Motahari 2019). Although prior studies evaluating the translation quality of *Midaq Alley*, in particular, have concluded that it was satisfactory, these assessments have been conducted using a functional TQA model.

Since novels and their authors hold such a significant position in the source language (SL), House (1977, 1997, 2015) prescribes overt translation—the translation type that retains the source text's (ST) function, style and culture in translation. Translating these texts overtly meets their functional equivalence, which is the benchmark for the assessment of translation quality in House's (2015) TQA model. In overt translation, the translator does not follow the TL's norms, but only transfers the ST and the source culture to the target text (TT). On the other hand, according to House (2015: 56), covert translation, i.e. the translation that follows the TT and its culture, should be used for original texts that are not pragmatically or culturally specific in the SL; thus, the ST's function must be transferred to the TL in a way that is appropriate for the receiving culture.

Although House's approach has received acknowledgement for its comprehensiveness and for proposing these translation typologies, it does not consider the TT's actual readers. In fact, House (2001: 254) questions the assessment's objectivity when it relies mainly on "social evaluation" (i.e. on human subjective intuition and judgment), in the absence of any well-defined linguistic rules (i.e. when based on a TQA model).

American readers' reviews of English translations of *Midaq Alley* on Amazon.com suggest that some readers are not satisfied with these translations, especially with Le Gassik's version. While some readers raise concerns about the omission of large portions of the ST in the TT, others refer to the choices made by the translators in rendering the cultural items and style of the original text. For instance, one reader states that:

> *This book is among the best by Mahfouz […], but there is too much lost in the translation, this affected not only the plot but also Mahfouz's style. The reduction has changed the novel into a short story in my opinion.*

Another reader clearly criticizes the transference of cultural items as follows:

> *The main feature of this book is the places and culture of the inhabitants of this alley. I feel the translation of many cultural features especially the street names are made so western. I understand the translator made it for the reader, but it made it read alien to its Egyptian culture.*

As can be seen from these comments, the feedback provided by readers highlights their dissatisfaction with the current translations of *Midaq Alley*, suggesting the presence of potential quality-related issues in these translations from the readers' perspectives.

Concerns about the importance of considering the reader in translation have been raised for many years, albeit from different perspectives. For instance, Pym (2020: 453) raises concerns regarding the limited knowledge about "how readers construe translations", and Hermans (1999: 63) points out that the translator's primary concern should be the TT reader, because the text only comes alive in the hands of readers when they make sense of it.

Readers of the TT may have certain expectations about these foreign texts and cultures, especially in literary translation, which contains a variety of culturally and historically specific

references, as well as other ST-related features. Therefore, the literary translator's job is critical, because the translation is expected to satisfy these readers' expectations and to guarantee an appropriate transfer of the traditions and cultures without diminishing their value (Hassan 2015: 60), resulting in a better quality of knowledge about other societies. Thus, the TT readership's expectations must be examined through empirical studies, and specifically, readers' expectations should be scrutinized regarding House's prescription of overt translation to translate literary texts.

The present study is an attempt to examine one of the most distinctive aspects of quality, determined through an empirical evaluation whereby quality (as shown through the translator's choice of overt or covert translation) is determined through the eyes of the TT receivers. The main objectives are to empirically investigate whether the readers' expectations are in line with House's prescription of overt translation to translate fiction written by significant writers and to identify the reason for these expectations.

2.   Litrature review

Scholars have shown an increasing interest in TQA, leading to the proposal of a number of TQA models, including those by Reiss (1971), Nord (1991), Williams (2004), Delizée (2011), Hewson (2011), and House (1977, 1997, 2015). Each of these models have tackled the TQ differently. In some of these TQA models, quality is defined in terms of function whether as it manifests in the text types (Reiss 1971), in the interaction between the text's intra-textual and inter-textual factors (Nord 1991), or in the text's situational context (House 1977, 1997, 2015). On the other hand, in William's (2004) model, quality can be defined as transferring the ST argument into the TT based on specific criteria, whereas in Delizée's (2011) model, quality is determined by examining several translation skills (e.g. linguistic and professional skills). In Howsen's (2011) model, assessing the quality requires examining the paratexts of the ST and TT (e.g. collect information about ST, the author, and the translator) as well as examining the TT at the micro level.

Many of these models (e.g. Reiss 1971; Nord 1991; Howsen 2011) are considered theoretically valid; nevertheless, they do not have a clear operationalization methodology (House 2015). In fact, except for House's (1997, 2015) models, the parameters set by the aforementioned models to assess the TQ are unsystematized and randomly discussed. By incorporating the register theory, House's (1997, 2015) models provide a more systematic way to assess the TQ by identify the text's function, discussing these parameters under *Field*, *Tenor*, and *Mode*. Moreover, in terms of the model's operationalization, House (1997, 2015) provides a clear methodology to identify the text's function and its translation quality.

Regardless of the different criteria that these TQA models use to approach the TQ, none of them include the actual TT reader in their assessments, but they rather assume an implied reader. The major distinction between implied and actual readers made by Suojanen et al. (2015) can shed light on how the concept of TT reader has been approached in translation studies. While the former is addressed through theoretical concepts, the latter is examined through empirical research involving actual participants. Although concern for the reader in translation has a long tradition in translation studies, scant attention has been paid to the actual reader in literary translation studies that are concerned with TQA.

House (2015: 12), particularly, is highly critical of Toury's (1995) assertion that translation is considered a fact of the target culture, arguing that a more valid approach to

assessment must begin with an analysis of the ST. However, the translation may not be considered successful if it does not satisfy the TT readers' expectations in the first place (Ameri et al. 2018: 435; Jiang 2010), because without taking the TT readers' expectations into consideration, it is hardly possible to "judge the translation's extra-linguistic context adequately" (McAuley 2015: 221).

A thorough investigation of the literature reveals that the TQA has been mainly tackled theoretically. Among these studies are theoretical endeavors undertaken to explore the different methodologies adopted to assess translation quality (e.g. Han 2020), to explore and demonstrate TQA-related terminologies (e.g. Brunette 2000). Other studies have applied a theoretical TQA model such as House's (1997, 2015), TQA models (e.g. Vallès 2014; Naidj & Motahari 2019), and Nord's (1991) TQA model (e.g. Aladwan 2011) to assess the translation quality of literary texts. However, the evaluation in these studies relies solely on applying a TQA model and assessing the quality of literary translation, completely neglecting the actual TT readers, who represent a significant priority in translation.

On the other hand, TQA has been researched empirically to evaluate the translation quality of the TTs from the perspective of the TT reader through questionnaires (Chesnokova et al. 2017) and by surveying readers' reviews on book websites (İlmek 2020). These empirical studies are mainly inclined towards the TT readers, passing over the fact that translation is also a linguistic act that needs to be evaluated based on well-defined rules – that is, based on an acknowledged TQA model – rather than relying mainly on human subjective intuition and judgement.

From a different perspective, while not directly relevant to the current study, some attempts have been made to document the reception of literary translation by focusing on the cognitive effort required in receiving domestication and foreignization strategies in children's books translated from English into Afrikaans (Kruger 2013), stylistic and linguistic preferences of readers towards translation (D'Egidio 2015; Wang & Humblé 2019), and the influence of interaction between the reader and translator on readers' reception of a translation (Chen 2022).

In the context of Arabic literature TQA, readers' reception appears under-researched, which prompts the necessity for empirical examination. In fact, very few studies have tackled the translation quality of Arabic literary works (e.g. Aladwan 2011; Hassan 2015). Yet, these studies are purely theoretical, based on textual analysis, neglecting the reception of the actual TT readers for whom these texts are translated in the first place. The TT readers, though, play a significant role in TQA, as indicated by Li (2012: 128–129), who maintains that the ultimate assessment criterion for the success of a translation must be its acceptance by its receivers, since he depicts translation as a social activity through which the translator provides a service to others, namely the TT readers.

As can be concluded from reviewing the previous studies, hardly any study has tackled TQA of literary texts through TT readers' reception based on a theoretical TQA model. Thus, the current study attempts to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on translation quality assessment by investigating whether House's (2015) prescription of overt translation to translate fiction goes in line with the TT readers' expectations and the underlying reasons behind their preferences.

3. Methods

This study aims to examine readers' preferences with regard to House's (2015) prescription of overt translation to translate literary texts. Therefore, to prepare the materials for the interviews, House's (2015) TQA model was applied to identify the translation types employed in the two selected TTs, namely overt and covert translations. Subsequently, in the second phase of data collection, interviews were conducted to investigate TT readers' preferences towards covert and overt translations of excerpts from *Midaq Alley*.

3.1. Materials for interviews

In the first phase, data was collected from books: the ST was collected from زقاق المدق *Midaq Alley* (1949), written by Naguib Mahfouz in Arabic, TT1 from Le Gassik's (1975) English translation of *Midaq Alley*, and TT2 from Davies's (2011) English translation of *Midaq Alley*. In *Midaq Alley*, Mahfouz shows how ordinary people were affected by World War II, with the story unfolding in an actual historical location and holding cultural value in Egypt (Deeb 1983: 121–124). Since the story tackles one of the major social classes spread throughout the Middle East, namely the working class, this novel is representative of many Middle Eastern societies.

To analyze the data, House's (2015) TQA model was applied to the ST, TT1 and TT2. To apply House's (2015) TQA model, one must provide the ST textual profile attained by analyzing the ST within its situational context, under the register categories *Field*, *Tenor*, *Mode*, and *Genre* through their linguistic realization in the text, in order to provide a statement of function. This is followed by providing the TT's textual profile and comparing it to the ST's textual profile to produce a statement of quality and determine whether the function of the ST has been rendered into the TT overtly or covertly. Following House's (2015) operationalization phases, the ST and its translations were analyzed to identify instances in which the translations were different, i.e. where the text was translated overtly in one TT and covertly in the other. The examples provided in Table 1 represent both the various linguistic realizations of *Field*, *Tenor*, and *Mode* in the ST and their treatment in the TTs, i.e. the covert and overt translations.

In House's (2015: 127) TQA model, *Field* refers to the text's subject matter and social action. Lexical means are sought, including the granularity of lexis, lexical fields (the semantic fields of words), and Hallidayan processes (material, mental, and relational) House (2015: 126). In *Midaq Alley*, *Field* is realized through the use of several cultural, religious, and historical references, metaphors, and similes to feed the subject matter and social action.

Tenor refers to the participatory relationship between the addresser and addressees (House 2015: 127). This is identified via examination of lexical and/or syntactic means according to the dimensions of the author's temporal, social and geographical provenance, as well as his or her intellectual and emotional stance, social role relationship, social attitude, and participation (House 2015: 126). In *Midaq Alley*, the inclusion of lexical items used in a certain period, among a certain social class or in a particular country, shows the author's temporal, social, and geographical provenance. Further, his (intellectual and emotional) stance is manifested through the use of positive/negative connoted words and long compound-complex sentences in which additive paratactic relations are dominant. The social role relationship appears through the names of the characters and the use of different utterances with various illocutionary forces. Also, the use of both popular and formal lexical items reflects the text's formal-consultative social attitude. Finally, the novel's complex participation is visible through the ample use of exclamations, comment parentheses, elliptical clauses, phrases marked *[-

formal], direct address to the reader using the second-person pronoun *you*, imperative structure, stimulating dialogue, and rhetorical questions.

In *Mode*, which tackles the text's medium (spokenness versus writtenness) and connectivity (coherence and cohesion), lexical, syntactic and/or textual means are sought (House 2015: 126–127). In this novel, the written-to-be-read-as-if-spoken medium is indicated through the use of special spoken language signals, vulgarisms, interjections, qualifying adverbial modals, quotation marks, anacoluthon, and the use of personal didactic. Finally, connectivity is achieved through the use of structural parallelism and lexical repetition.

The examples shown in Table 1 have been selected based on two main criteria. First, they are representative of the findings under each register variable, covering all the situational dimensions under *Field*, *Tenor* and *Mode*. Second, these instances have each been translated covertly in one TT and overtly in the other, providing an opportunity to present the TT reader with the two translation types simultaneously.

Detailed results of this analysis are not presented here, as the current study focuses on readers' expectations and this phase of data collection aimed solely to prepare the materials for the interview, and more importantly, due to space restrictions. Suffice to say that several instances of overt and covert translations were identified by comparing the textual profiles of the ST and the TT, following all the steps required based on House's (2015) model. The instances used in the interviews are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of examples of overt and covert translation

	Ex	Linguistic realizations	ST	Gloss	TT1	TT2	Covert/ Overt
	1	Cultural reference	يرفل في جبته وقفطان.	Struts off in <u>his juba and caftan.</u>	He struts off, dressed in his <u>flowing robe and cloak.</u>	The owner, Master Salim Elwan, who struts off in his <u>Jubba and caftan.</u>	TT1 covert translation TT2 overt translation
Field	**2**	Religious reference	ويقولون عنه انه ولي من <u>أولياء الله</u> الصالحين، يأتيه الوحي باللغتين العربيه والانجليزية.	And they say about him that he is a holy man of the good <u>devoted to God,</u> to whom revelation came in the two languages, Arabic and English.	And said that he was a fine and <u>holy man of God,</u> to whom revelation came in two languages, Arabic and English!	They declared that he was one of '<u>God's Righteous Friends'</u> and that the revelation had been imparted to him in both Arabic and English.	TT1 covert translation TT2 overt translation
	3	Historical reference	جاوز المدق إلى الصنادقية <u>والغورية</u> والصاغة	It reached far beyond the alley to the <u>Sanadyqia,</u>	And had even crossed the boundaries of the alley to the	Extending beyond the confines of the alley to reach	TT1 overt translation TT2 covert translation

			Ghuriyah, and the Sagha.	quarters of Sanadiqiya, Ghouriya, and Sagha.	Boxmakers Street, Ghouriya Street, and the gold market.
4	Metaphor	فازدحمت برأسه الخواطر	And thoughts crowded in his head.	And this brought tormenting thoughts to his mind.	And thoughts crowded into his head.	TT1 covert translation TT2 overt translation
5	Simile	وتبعه عم كامل يتبختر كالمحمل، ويقتلع قدميه من الأرض اقتلاعا	And followed him uncle Kamil strutting like a palanquin, hardly picking his feet off the ground.	He was followed by Uncle Kamil, swaying as majestically as the royal camel litter on its way to Mecca, picking his feet high up off the ground.	Uncle Kamil followed, swaying like a palanquin, picking his feet up laboriously and deliberately as he walked.	TT1 covert translation TT2 overt translation
6	Social dialect	وتفرق نفر قليل بين مقاعدها يدخنون الجوز.	And a few men scattered between its seats smoking gozas.	A few men are scattered about on the couches smoking.	And a small number of people are distributed among the seats, smoking gozas.	TT1 covert translation TT2 overt translation
7	Words with negative connotation	شطار المدق (Ch. 2, p. 33)	The Midaq's scoundrels.	Clever people. (Ch. 2, p. 12)	Alley's scoundrels. (Ch. 2, p. 19)	TT1 covert translation TT2 overt translation
8	The characters' names	أصبحت أم حسين – امرأة المعلم كرشة- في هم مقيم.	Umm Hussein- the wife of Boss Kirsha- became in a permanent distress.	Mrs. Kirsha, the cafe owner's wife, was extremely worried.	Umm Hussein, Boss Kersha's wife, was now in a state of permanent distress.	TT1 covert translation TT2 overt translation
9	Popular words (consultative attitude)	فاذا حدث نزيف- وليس هذا بالأمر النادر- اعتبر عادة من عند الله.	And if a bleeding occurs – and this is not a rare thing – it was regarded from God.	"If there were serious loss of blood, as frequently happened, he generally considered it the work of God".	"And if, as was not unusual, a hemorrhage occurred it was generally regarded as God's will".	TT1 overt translation TT2 covert translation

Row label (vertical, spanning rows 8–9): **Tenor**

10	Exclamation	<u>فلله ما أبرعه وما أفطنه وما أبعد نظره!</u>	<u>For God How brilliant and how clever he is and how far is his seeing!</u>	She now saw how farsighted he had been.	<u>How surpassingly sagacious and far-sighted is God!</u>	TT1 covert translation TT2 overt translation
11	Special spoken language signals	جن حسين جنونا واجتاحته ثورة عنيفة تفور مقتا للزقاق وأهله. <u>أجل</u> كان من زمن بعيد يلعن كراهيته للزقاق وأهله ويتطلع لحياة جديدة._	Hussein became crazy and was invaded by a violent revolution loaded with hatred for the ally and its inhabitants. <u>Yes,</u> he was long time ago cursing his hatred of the alley and its inhabitants and looking forward for a new life.	Hussain now found himself completely unsettled and full of hostility for the alley and its inhabitants. For a long time he had expressed his disgust for the alley and tried to plan a new life for himself.	Hussain became frantic and experienced a violent reaction against the alley inhabitants. <u>True,</u> he had long proclaimed his hatred of it and them looked forward to a better life.	TT1 covert translation TT2 overt translation
12	Vulgarism	وأما نظرة عينيه فقاتلها الله من نظرة تستوجب أعنف عراك!	As for the look of his eyes, <u>God fight it (cursing),</u> of a look that requires the most violent fight!	As for <u>that challenging look in his eyes, what a splendid battle it</u> invited.	The look in his eyes, though, <u>God damn them,</u> called for a violent response.	TT1 covert translation TT2 overt translation
13	Interjection	ثم.. <u>رياه</u> ما هذا؟ .. إنه لم يبرح مكانه، قابضا على خرطوم نارجيلته!	Then .. <u>My God</u> what is this? He did not leave his place, holding the tube of his hookah!	Then there he was, sitting clutching the stem of his water pipe.	Then… <u>dear God,</u> what was that? He was still there holding the hose of his water pipe!	TT1 covert translation TT2 overt translation
14	Structural parallelism	ذهبن إليها مكدودات هزيلات فقيرات، وسرعان ما أدركهن تبدل وتغير في ردح قصير من الزمن، <u>شبعن بعد جوع،</u>	They went to it exhausted, emaciated and poor, and soon they experienced a transform and a change in a short period of	They had gone into factory work exhausted, emaciated, and destitute. Soon remarkable changes were noticeable: <u>their</u>	They have arrived exhausted, emaciated, and poor, only to undergo within a short interval, <u>eating well</u>	TT1 covert translation TT2 overt translation

(**Mode** spans rows 12–14 as a vertical row label)

		وكسين بعد عري، وامتلأن بعد هزال	time, they got filled after hunger, and got dressed after nakedness, and got some weight after emaciation.	once undernourished bodies filled out and seemed to radiate a healthy pride and vitality"	when once they had gone hungry, dressing decently when once they had been barely clothed, filling out when once they had been thin.	
15	Lexical repetition	يا للشقاء ي حميدة إنك شقية وإني شقي كلانا شقي بفعل هذا الخطأ يحوب بيننا إلى الأبد ولكن بينما يشقى كلانا بهذا الخطأ، إذا بالمجرم الأول مطمئن سعيد كأنما يسعد بشقائنا.	What a suffering. Hamida! You are suffering I am suffering we both are suffering because of this mistake that stands between us. However, while both of us suffer with this mistake, the first criminal tranquil and happy as if he is enjoying our suffering.	"How awful, Hamida! Both of us are miserable because of that low bestial criminal".	"There has been so much suffering, Hamida! You're suffering and I'm suffering. Both of us have been made to suffer by what criminal did".	TT1 covert translation TT2 overt translation

3.2. Interviews

Twenty participants were selected through purposive sampling and recruited via e-mail and WhatsApp. The interviewees were selected based on the following criteria. Firstly, as stated earlier, *Midaq Alley* has been translated three times for publication in the USA, which indicates a high interest in translating this novel for the American audience. Therefore, all the participants were Americans. Secondly, they all spoke English with native/near-native proficiency. Finally, they were familiar with literature and literary language.

Participants signed a consent letter and were made aware that their participation was anonymous. The research was approved by the research ethics committee of the University of Malaya. Interviewees were presented with a total of 15 examples, with five of each belonging to different situational dimensions under each register category, namely *Field*, *Tenor*, and *Mode*, as shown in Table 1. These examples were translated overtly in one TT and covertly in the other. The interviews took between 45 and 70 minutes. During the interviews, participants

were shown each example on a single slide in the form of a table showing four columns, namely the ST, gloss (showing a literal translation of the ST), TT1, and TT2, respectively. The participants were asked which translation they preferred and why.

Then, to analyze the data collected via the interviews, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify the emerging themes. Thematic analysis is considered "a method for developing, analyzing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes" (Clarke & Braun 2021: 66). Clarke & Braun (2021: 89) propose six phases to conduct a thematic analysis, starting with familiarizing oneself with the data, then generating initial codes, generating initial themes, developing and reviewing the themes, refining, defining and naming themes, and writing up. All these phases were followed to conduct the thematic analysis in this study, whereby the interview data were read and re-read several times to ensure familiarity with the interview content and critically analyze it to determine what data recurred in the respondents' answers. These answers were then coded and arranged into categories, named as themes. The findings from this analysis will be presented in the next section.

4. Findings

The findings from the interviews showed that the participants preferred excerpts from both translation types proposed by House (2015) – overt and covert translations – regardless of the category to which they belonged (i.e. *Field*, *Tenor*, and *Mode*). As can be seen from Table 2, while the respondents chose overt translation 51, 48, and 50 times under *Field*, *Tenor*, and *Mode* respectively, they also chose covert translation 49, 52, 50 times under these categories. Overt translation was chosen 149 times in total (under *Field*, *Tenor* and *Mode*), while covert translation was selected 151 times (under these categories). These results indicate that the respondents expressed a relatively equal preference for the two translation types, with no clear preference for either. Hence, it can be concluded that the TT readers involved in this study did not prefer one translation type over the other; rather, they preferred each in certain instances for specific reasons, contradicting House's (2015) prescription of overt translation.

Table 2: Summary of TT readers' preferences for overt and covert translations

Category	Translation	Ex 1	Ex 2	Ex 3	Ex 4	Ex 5	Total
Field	Overt	13	8	9	11	10	51
	Covert	7	12	11	9	10	49
Tenor	Overt	10	9	8	10	11	48
	Covert	10	11	12	10	9	52
Mode	Overt	12	7	10	11	10	50
	Covert	8	13	10	9	10	50
Total	Overt				149		
	Covert				151		

4.1. Criteria for selecting the preferred type of translation

From the participants' answers, four themes emerged, two of which referred to the participants' justification for preferring overt translation, namely that translation should reflect the ST culture and the TT should reflect the ST's accurate meaning and style, while the other two alluded to covert translation, namely that the TT should be creative and should sound natural in the TL.

4.1.1. The translation should reflect the ST culture

The participants demonstrated a notable inclination towards being introduced to the ST's culture, as encapsulated in the text, encompassing aspects such as traditional costumes and religious and historical references. This willingness to explore the ST culture aligns harmoniously with House's (2015) conceptualization of overt translation, wherein the translator endeavors to preserve the cultural essence of the ST within the translation.

The interviewees' interest in the ST's cultural items was notably captured in their tendency to appreciate elements such as the traditional costumes, as well as the cultural connotations conveyed through religious references and reference to historical sites. Consequently, when the translation effectively retained and portrayed these Arabic cultural aspects, thereby situating the narrative within its authentic cultural environment, it garnered respondents' appreciation because this faithful rendition enhanced their understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures, as expressed by Participant 3:

> *In this scenario, the focus is on a Western reader who receives an Arabic text stripped of its original culture. The question arises: What is the purpose of this? The reader should have read literature from their own culture rather than exploring literature from other cultures if they are unwilling to be introduced to the original culture. I like the translation showing the words in the original text's culture [...] I want to know about the story within the culture, where it takes place, and to enhance my knowledge of new cultures.*

Furthermore, overt translation enabled the respondents to appreciate additional facets of the ST culture, including the manner in which the novel's characters, representing the ST culture, expressed formality in their communication. As one interviewee put it:

> *The word 'brother Arab' is more interesting – it sounded as if extracted from a speech in a formal situation, maybe to motivate the listener so because the friendly way is supposedly to say 'brother' or 'bro', but the use of the word 'Arab' makes it more formal to me, if I may say, because I never can find other possible explanation and even cultural, because in English and in western cultures – say in the US – we do not say 'brother American', you know?*

4.1.2. The translation should be accurate

The respondents' appreciation for translation accuracy was evident when the translation demonstrated a faithful adherence to the ST's style and meaning. In House's (2015: 66) terms, the faithful rendition of the ST's meaning and style is associated with the concept of overt translation maintaining a high degree of fidelity to the ST.

The respondents expressed their appreciation for accuracy in translation, particularly in retaining the ST's style, reflected in the use of metaphors and similes. They valued this aspect

of translation because it preserved the aesthetic value of the ST, conveying meaning in a creative and expressive manner and allowing the TT readers to gain a deeper understanding of the content, as noted by Participant 2:

> *I like the translation in TT2 more because it is more artistic. I can detect a cluster of metaphors or metaphoric use of the words in the original text from the gloss. I like to have this metaphor in translation too, you know […] it speaks pages about the confusion in the head of this person metaphorically, and it exactly shows like it is not one thought or two, it is a crowd of thoughts […] I will choose the second translation because it exactly follows the original text in this.*

Besides retaining the ST's style, the respondents drew on the accurate transfer of another aspect, namely the accurate meaning of words expressing the author's emotions. The interviewees appreciated overt translation when it accurately showed the original meaning of a word, since this accurate transfer of meaning allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of the author's emotions and intentions within the narrative, as indicated by one of the respondents:

> *'[C]lever' reflects a positive meaning but 'scoundrels' reflects a negative one […] 'scoundrels' in this context cannot replace 'clever'. The translation in TT1 should have put into consideration the precise meaning of the word in this context […] the author intentionally used this word for a reason: this is important to tell his story. It's very wrong to change it like TT1.*

Likewise, the participants emphasized the need not only to communicate the author's emotions accurately, but equally importantly, to communicate the feelings of the characters in the novel, expressed creatively by the ST author through the repetition of certain lexical items. This was emphasized by one respondent as follows:

> *I like TT2: it heated the feelings just like the original because it is very expressive and materializing the text it is more sensible and sentimental in this translation because it gives a realistic description with expressive details […] the repetition of 'suffering' gives me how is this man or women is suffering: it shows me the feeling and sets me in the mood. I mean, it delivers the feeling as the person feels it, and I can experience what she is feeling because of the emphasis of the word in TT2, just like the original.*

4.1.3. The TT should be creative

The participants acknowledged the translator's creativity, which was evident to them via covert translation, reflecting the translator's ability to simplify the ST, or not to translate it literally. This deviation from the ST aligns with House's (2015) concept of covert translation, where the translator does not adhere to the ST's norms and culture. This creativity was evident through phenomena such as addition: that is, adding clarifying words in the TT that were not present in the ST or simplifying words in the ST that the reader might have found relatively complicated. For instance, respondents appreciated the translator's addition of certain words because such modifications facilitated a better understanding of the text, as mentioned by Participant 9:

> *Instead of using the metaphor and following the original, the translator added a more beautiful touch by adding the word 'tormenting', which he finds more expressive and*

meaningful than the original metaphor because it clarifies what kind of thoughts this
person has in his mind.

Additionally, the respondents appreciated the translators' creativity when they employed more advanced English words, because they acknowledged that such creativity contributed to the overall aesthetic appeal of the text, as stated by Participant 6:

> *TT2 sounds more convincing to me and more appealing because it displays a mastery*
> *use of language form the translator's side. He is considering that many people will read*
> *the text [...] it uses nicer and more advanced English.*

The interviewees also acknowledged the creativity reflected in the omission of some bizarre features of the ST. For instance, they appreciated the translator's decision to omit dialect from the ST that they could not understand, as this omission contributed to a smoother reading experience. As Participant 7 put it:

> *I like the translator's job in TT1 because he deleted the word 'goza' of the original,*
> *which is very bizarre to me. I prefer 'smoking' in TT1 because this one is less difficult*
> *and already conveys the needed information for me to conceive a number of people*
> *drinking tea and smoking. OK, fine – I like that to stop right there.*

4.1.4. Naturalness in the target language

As well as the translator's creativity, the respondents also appreciated the naturalness of translation in the TL, providing a more familiar text that read as if it had been written in the TL. Providing the TT reader with a more familiar text aligns the TT well to House's (2015) notion of covert translation, through which the ST is utterly situated within the TL and culture.

Some participants expressed a preference for translating these cultural elements into more familiar terms that would resonate effectively with English readers. This viewpoint is exemplified by Participant 17's comment, which emphasized how the transformation of a culturally specific item in the ST into a more familiar element in the TT enhanced the TT's comprehension and catered to the expectations of English readers.

> *The expression in TT1 is fluent and very understandable. I read it and use it often myself.*
> *I feel it reveals the meaning of the original properly. I like the use of common words,*
> *used in daily life [...] here the original is not absent or changed in TT1 – it just presents*
> *the main idea of the original with very common and natural expressions in English.*

The respondents' appreciation for naturalness in the TT extended beyond cultural elements and encompassed the TT's straightforward, easy-to-decipher style of English. Their emphasis on achieving a clear and straightforward writing style in the TT highlighted the importance of linguistic fluency and ease of comprehension. As Participant 16 put it:

> *I will go with the translation in TT1 because this translation just reads smoother. I do*
> *not know again here, I am thinking whether repetition is favored in English language*
> *in this context, I think Arabs tend to show affection, so I guess that is why the author*
> *repeats this word, because the character is sharing a difficult experience or whatever,*
> *but for the English reader, one word is just fine. TT1 is more related to English in my*
> *beliefs.*

5. Concluding thoughts

The present study examined whether the TT readers' preference aligned with House's (2015) prescription of overt translation in translating literary texts written by acknowledged writers by focusing on *Midaq Alley*. Additionally, the study delved into the underlying factors influencing readers' preferences for either translation type. The prominent finding that emerged from this study was that the respondents did not have a strong preference for one translation type over the other; rather, they preferred aspects of both types for specific reasons. This finding did not align with House's (2015) prescription of overt translation for significant literary works written by renowned authors. The findings further revealed that the TT readers who favored overt translation did so because they expected the translation to introduce them to the ST culture as well as the ST's author unique style. Meanwhile, the participants who preferred covert translation expected the TT to sound natural and to reflect the translator's creativity.

Notably, in line with the present study, some scholars (e.g. Kruger 2016; Barkhordar & Fatemi 2020) have related House's (1977, 1997, 2015) typologies of overt and covert translations to Venuti's (1995) translation typologies, namely foreignization (conforming to the ST's culture) and domestication (following the cultural norms of the target reader), with overt translation reflecting foreignization in evoking the ST and its culture, while covert translation is parallel to domestication in erasing any traces of the ST's culture in favor of its TT counterpart. In fact, the divergence in TT readers' preferences, shown through the findings of this study, highlights the ongoing debate surrounding translation tendencies of foreignization and domestication in the context of literary translation. The choice between these two translation typologies for literary texts has been the subject of intense debate within translation studies (Yang 2010: 77). On the one hand, domestication is advocated for literary texts because this translation style is seen as a means of facilitating cultural communication (Ping 2002: 39–40; Wang 2014: 2427). On the other hand, Zhili (2002: 40–44) favors foreignization for literary translation because the translator is primarily expected to convey the full and precise message and style of the ST. For ideological reasons, Venuti (1995: 147) also prescribes foreignization for literary texts to challenge the cultural dominance of certain powerful cultures, such as the Western culture. The findings of this study, however, did not provide a definitive resolution to this debate. Instead, it was revealed that the preferences of the TT readers were dependent on the specific factors they valued in the translation.

Theoretically, House's (2015) approach does not present a conflict between covert and overt translations, as the choice between them is determined by the nature of the ST, specifically its relatedness to the ST culture and its intended audience. For instance, texts that are strongly rooted in the ST culture and are addressed specifically to the ST audience call for overt translation, while covert translation is prescribed for texts that are not culturally embedded in the ST or specifically targeted to its audience. However, the empirical findings of this study diverge from House's (2015) theoretical approach in the sense that the respondents did not favor one translation type over the other; rather, their preferences were shaped by individual factors that they prioritized in a translation, such as cultural immersion, accuracy, creativity, and naturalness. This finding aligns well with Chesterman's (1997) concept of expectancy norms. This concept remains beyond the scope of the current study, but is subject to the TT readers' expectations and closely concerned with the attitudes of the recipients of a translation.

The findings, therefore, assist in our understanding of the TT readers' role in translation studies and shed light on their expectations and preferences regarding literary translation. However, it is important to acknowledge several limitations associated with these findings. Firstly, the study was conducted exclusively with American participants, which, although justifiable, may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Including speakers of other English varieties could potentially unveil additional quality-related phenomena that TT readers would (or would not) like to see in translated literary works. Secondly, the study focused specifically on Arabic-English translation, and it would be beneficial to investigate the reception of overt and covert translations among TT readers in different language pairs. Lastly, this study concentrated solely on fiction. Future research could explore how TT readers perceive and respond to translated works in other literary genres, such as poetry and plays. By examining the reception of literary translation in terms of quality, this study holds implications for translators, translation trainees, and assessors responsible for evaluating the quality of translated literary texts.

References

Aladwan, Dima. 2011. *Translation quality assessment: Naguib Mahfouz's Midaq Alley as case study*. Woodhouse: University of Leeds. (Doctoral dissertation).

Alhamshary, Yousreya Ahmed Ali. 2021. On translating culture-bound expressions in Naguib Mahfouz's The Thief and the Dogs and strategies: A comparative study in Arabic-English translation. مجلة وادى النيل للدراسات والبحوث الإنسانية والاجتماعية والتربويه 31(31): 137–188.

Alkhawaja, Linda. 2014. *The role of social agents in the translation into English of the novels of Naguib Mahfouz*. Birmingham: Aston University. (Doctoral dissertation).

Altoma, Salih J. 2005. *Modern Arabic literature in translation*. London: Westbourne Grove.

Ameri, Saeed & Khoshsaligheh, Masood & Farid, Ali Khazaee. 2018. The reception of Persian dubbing: A survey on preferences and perception of quality standards in Iran. *Perspectives* 26 (3): 435–451.

Barkhordar, Seyyed Yahya & Fatemi, Reza. 2020. A comparison between the translation dichotomies suggested by Juliane House and Lawrence Venuti. *Journal of Practical Studies in Education* 1(2): 9–15.

Brunette, Louise. 2000. Towards a terminology for translation quality assessment: A comparison of TQA practices. In Maier, Carol (ed.), *Evaluation and translation*. London: Routledge. 169–182.

Chen, Xuemei. 2022. Interactive reception of online literary translation: The translator-readers dynamics in a discussion forum. *Perspectives* 31(4): 1–15.

Chesnokova, Anna & Zyngier, Sonia & Viana, Vander & Jandre, Juliana & Rumbesht, Anna & Ribeiro, Fernanda. 2017. Cross-cultural reader response to original and translated poetry: An empirical study in four languages. *Comparative Literature Studies* 54(4): 824–849.

Chesterman, Andrew. 1997. *Memes of translation: The spread of ideas in translation theory*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Clarke, Victoria & Braun, Virginia. 2021. *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. New York, London: Sage.

Davies, Humphrey T. 2011. *Midaq Alley.* (Translation). Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press.

Deeb, Marius. 1983. Najib Mahfuz's *Midaq Alley*: A socio-cultural analysis. *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)* 10(2): 121–130.

D'egidio, Angela. 2015. How readers perceive translated literary works: An analysis of reader reception. *Lingue e Linguaggi* 14: 69–82.

Delizée, Anne. 2011. A global rating scale for the summative assessment of pragmatic translation at master's level: An attempt to combine academic and professional criteria. In Depraetere, Ilse (ed.), *Perspectives on translation quality*. Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter. 9–24.

El-Zawawy, Amr. 2019. The description of the setting in two translations of Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*. In *FORUM. Revue Internationale d'interprétation et de Traduction/International Journal of Interpretation and Translation* 17(2): 149–191.

Han, Chao. 2020. Translation quality assessment: A critical methodological review. *The Translator* 26(3): 257–273.

Hassan, Bahaa-Eddin Abulhassan. 2015. A translation quality assessment of the English translation of the Hilali Epic. *Journal of Arts and Humanities* 4(12): 59–70.

Hermans, Theo. 1999. *Translation in systems: Descriptive and system-oriented approaches explained*. Manchester: St. Jerome.

House, Juliane. 1977. *A model for assessing translation quality.* Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.

House, Juliane. 1997. *Translation quality assessment: A model revisited*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.

House, Juliane. 2001. Translation quality assessment: Linguistic description versus social evaluation. *Meta: Journal des Traducteurs/Meta: Translators' Journal* 46(2): 243–257.

House, Juliane. 2015. *Translation quality assessment: Past and present*. London, New York: Routledge.

Hyde, George M. 1991. Literary translation. *Hungarian Studies in English* 22: 39–47.

Hewson, Lance. 2011. *An approach to translation criticism*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

İlmek, Seda Taş. 2020. Readers' voices for 'complete retranslations': A case study of Agatha Christie's Murder Mysteries in Turkish. *Agathos* 11(2): 161–175.

Jiang, Chengzhi. 2010. Quality assessment for the translation of museum texts: application of a systemic

functional model. *Perspectives* 18(2): 109–126.

Khalifa, Abdel-Wahab. 2020. The hidden violence of retranslation: Mahfouz's Awlād Ḥāratinā in English. *The Translator* 26(2): 145–162.

Kargarzadeh, Fateme & Paziresh, Abbas. 2017. Assessing the quality of Persian translation of *Kite Runner* based on House's (2014) Functional Pragmatic Model. *International Journal of English Language and Translation Studies* 5(1): 117–126.

Kruger, Haidee. 2013. Child and adult readers' processing of foreignised elements in translated South African picture books: An eye-tracking study. *Target* 25(2): 180–227.

Kruger, Haidee. 2016. Fluency/resistancy and domestication/foreignisation: A cognitive perspective. *Target* 28(1): 4–41.

Kuleli, Mesut. 2020. Culture specific items in literary texts and their translation based on 'Foreignization' and 'Domestication' strategies. *RumeliDE Journal of Language and Literature Studies* 7: 617–653.

Le Gassick, Trevor. 1975. *Midaq Alley.* (Translation). New York: Doubleday.

Li, Ping. 2012. Ideology-oriented translations in China: A reader-response study. *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 20(2): 127–137.

Mahfouz, Naguib. 1947. *Zuqaq Al-Midaq.* Cairo: Dar El-Shorouq.

Mcauley, Thomas. 2015. Audience attitude and translation reception: The case of Genji Monogatari. *Babel* 61(2): 219–241.

Naidj, Sara & Motahari, Masoud Seyed. 2019. Translation quality assessment in the literary text based on house model. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies* 1(2): 19–27.

Nord, Christiane. 1991. *Textanalyse und Übersetzen: Theoretische Grundlagen, Methode und didaktische Anwendung einer übersetzungsrelevanten Textanalyse* [Text analysis and translation: Theoretical foundations, method and didactic application of a translation-relevant text analysis]. Heidelberg: Groos.

Nord, Christiane. 2010. Functionalist approaches. *Handbook of translation studies* 1: 120–128.

Ping, Cai. 2002. Foreignization as the main method in translation. *Chinese Translators Journal* 5: 39–41.

Pym, Anthony. 2020. Translation, risk management and cognition. In Alves, Fabio & Arnt, Lykke Jakobsen (eds), *The Routledge handbook of translation and cognition*. London: Routledge. 445–458.

Reiss, Katharina. 1971. *Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Übersetzungskritik*. Munich: Hueber.

Suojanen, Tytti & Koskinen, Kaisa & Tuominen, Tiina. 2015. *User-centered translation*. Abingdon:

Routledge.

Toury, Gideon.1995. *Descriptive translation studies and beyond.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Tresilian, David. 2008. *A brief introduction to modern Arabic literature*. London: Saqi.

Vallès, Daniel. 2014. Applying Juliane House's translation quality assessment model (1997) on a humorous text: A case study of *The Simpsons*. *New Readings* 14: 42–63.

Venuti, Lawrence. 1995. *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation.* London: Routledge.

Wang, Fade. 2014. An approach to domestication and foreignization from the angle of cultural factors translation. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 4(11): 23–27.

Wang, Feng & Humblé, Philippe. 2019. Readers' perceptions of Anthony Yu's self-retranslation of the Journey to the West. *Perspectives* 28 (5): 756–776.

Williams, Malcolm. 2004. *Translation quality assessment: An argumentation-centred approach.* Canada: University of Ottawa Press.

Yang, Wenfen. 2010. Brief study on domestication and foreignization in translation. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 1(1): 77–80.

Zhili, Sun. 2002. Literature translation in China: From domestication to foreignization. *Chinese Translators Journal* 1: 40–44.

Randa Kullab (First author)
Department of English Language, Faculty of Languages and Linguistics
Universiti Malaya
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
E-mail: Randahkullab@gmail.com

Ali Jalalian Daghigh (Corresponding author)
Department of English Language, Faculty of Languages and Linguistics
Universiti Malaya
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
E-mail: jalalian@um.edu.my