

## Cracking Dan Brown's Cultural Elements into Albanian

Dr. Ilda Kanani

(PHD in Translation Studies)  
Lecturer of Translation Studies, Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Foreign Languages  
University of Vlora "Ismail Qemali", Albania  
ilda.kanani@univlora.edu.al; kanani.ilda@gmail.com

---

**Abstract:** *This translation analysis research pivots around the cultural elements in the two bestsellers of Dan Brown's, The Da Vinci Code and Angels and Demons, as conveyed into Albanian by translator Amik Kasoruh.*

*The focal point of our research is a translation analysis of the novels in question, without stepping onto domains of controversy, which these novels have triggered in various other fields of study; more precisely, we will focus on the names of Renaissance paintings and frescos in the SL texts (English) and the way they have been rendered in the TL text (Albanian). The translation analysis of such elements works at phrase level.*

*The study aims at shedding light on, and explaining, the problems that arise in the process of translating, by bringing together methods of translation with the choices and solutions made by our translator. At times, when we feel that the translator's decisions are not quite appropriate in the given context, we do not hesitate to make our own suggestions.*

**Keywords:** *translation analysis, cultural elements, Amik Kasoruh, Dan Brown, The Da Vinci Code, Angels and Demons.*

---

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Culture and cultural elements play a very important role in the process of translation of literary texts. Since the cultural turn which influenced the humanities in the 1980s the focus of the translation studies has changed as well. Thus, the focus is not only on rendering a text from source language to the target one, but on rendering the cultural elements as well, which according to translation scholars seems to be the most important challenge the translators who translate literature face today.

The debate is how to deal with the cultural elements which may be found on a certain novel and how the proper translators should translate them. Should they *translate them word for word*, should they *transliterate them*, should they *domesticate* them, or should they *leave them as they are* and explain by footnotes?

### 2. ABBREVIATIONS

ST- Source Text

TT- Target Text

### 3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research is primarily based on the *case study-method*. It tries to pivot around the cultural elements, more specifically on the names of *Renaissance paintings and frescos found in Dan Browns bestsellers The Da Vinci Code and Angels and Demons, and the way how they are translated into Albanian, by one of the best Albanian translator (as considered by the critics), Amik Kasorohu. The translation seems a challenge, as these cultural elements introduce unfamiliar concepts to the Albanian readers, making the job of a translator, even more challenging.*

Also, the research uses qualitative method by using ideas and opinions of the proper translator by 3 different interviews done with him for this purpose.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are different theories debating the role and status of the translator as compared to those of the author of the original text. Some critics are of the idea that the translator should be "invisible" up to a certain point, others that he should play an intermediary role between the two cultures. In this respect, Venuti seems to share Norman Shapiro's view of the translator's transparency:

*“I see translation as the attempt to produce a text so transparent that it does not seem to be translated. A good translation is like a pane of glass. You only notice that it’s there when there are little imperfections—scratches, bubbles. Ideally, there shouldn’t be any. It should never call attention to itself”*. [1 Shapiro qtd. in Venuti 1995: 1]

Later Venuti [2. Venuti 1995:17-18] adopts the Derridean perspective of “meaning [as] an effect of relations and differences among signifiers along a potentially endless chain (polysemous, intertextual, subject to infinite linkages, [...] always differential and deferred, never present as an original unity [3. Derrida 1982]” to decentre the roles of both translator and writer by suggesting that:

*“Both foreign text and translation are derivative: both consist of diverse linguistic and cultural materials that neither the foreign writer nor the translator originates, and that destabilize the work of signification, inevitably exceeding and possibly conflicting with their intentions. As a result, a foreign text is the site of many different semantic possibilities that are fixed only provisionally in any one translation, on the basis of varying cultural assumptions and interpretive choices, in specific social situations, in different historical periods”*. [4. Derrida 1995, 18]

Umberto Eco [5. Eco 2008: 17] seems to share the same idea: “A translator must take into account rules that are not strictly linguistic but, broadly speaking, cultural.”

Thus, what is emphasized in all these quotes is the fact that the cultural ingredient determines the quality of a good translation.

#### 4.1. The Reasons for the Research

The reasons why I chose to analyse the Albanian translation of the names of paintings and frescos found in the worldwide bestsellers *The Da Vinci Code* and *Angels and Demons* are: *first* the books are full of cultural elements and therefore, provide interest from the point of view of translation and *secondly* because they are translated into Albanian by one of the best Albanian literary translators, Amik Kasorhuo.

This reseach pivots in the above mentioned cultural elements in both novels and the way they are rendered into Albanian by explaining the translation methods, procedures alongside with the reasons behind the choices made by proper translator. This analysis will be made in phrase level.

The translator Amik Kasorhuo himself admits that his major difficulty in translating Brown’s novels into Albanian was introducing unfamiliar cultural elements to the Albanian readers. The elaborate details and sometimes lack of background proved challenging to the translator. To cope with them , the translator has used foreignising strategies, which infuse elements of each culture in a clearly visible way for stylistic purposes. In so doing, he has taken the role of mediator between cultures.

#### 4.2. The Case Study

The following are some examples taken from our linguistic corpora of the novels for research purposes together with their translation into Albanian. I will try to analyse the examples from the translation point of view by explaining the choice made by the translator in each case.

**Table1.** Names of Renaissance frescos and paintings found in the novels

Nr	The word in English	Page number	The translation into Albanian	Page number
01.	A Caravaggio	DVC, 3	Një pikturë të Caravaggio-os	KDV,13
02	The Last Judgement	A&D,163	Gjykimi Universal	E&D,155
03	Venus de Milo	DVC, 19	Venusin e Milos	KDV, 30
04	Winged Victory	DVC, 19	Fitoren me flatra	KDV, 30
05	Maddona of the Rocks	DVC, 155	Virgjëresha e shkëmbinjve Zonja e shkëmbinjve	KDV,184
06	Galileo and Milton	E&D, 219	Galileo dhe Miltoni	E&D, 315
07	The last Supper	DVC, 282	Darka e fundit	KDV,330
08	Adoration of the Magi	DVC, 184	Adhurimit të Magjëve	KDV, 216
09	The Penitent Magdalene	DVC, 283	Magdalena pendestare	KDV,332
10	The Vitruvian Man	DVC,71	Njeriu Vitruvian	KDV, 127
11	The Mona Lisa	DVC, 184	Mona Lisa	KDV, 216
12	A dominating fifteen-foot Botticelli	DVC, 116	Një pikturë të Botticellit	KDV,142

In the translation of the names of world known paintings of Leonardo Da Vinci's and some other Renaissance artists, the translator did not use only one translation technique, but rather a mixture of procedures. In some cases he *borrow*s terms into Albanian language, sometimes he gives a *literal translation* of them and sometimes he substitutes them with existing *Albanian equivalents*. These procedures substitute one another throughout the Albanian versions of the novels.

Thus, the translator uses literal translation of Da Vinci's works of art "*The Mona Lisa*" – "Mona Liza", "*The Vitruvian Man*"- "Njeriu Vitruvian", "*The Last Supper*" – "Darka e Fundit", a procedure which helps the translator and does not pose any difficulty for him or for the target readers to understand the cultural referent of these painting names into Albanian culture.

A translation which deviates from the literal one, is the translation into Albanian of Michelangelo's famous fresco "**The last judgement**" [6. <http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/last-judgment-sistine-chapel.html>] which can be found in the Sistine Chappel's Ceiling in the Vatican's city. *The Last Judgment* is a very old subject in art history represented by many artists. The subject is the Second Coming of Christ, where Christ returns to judge all of mankind. The title of the famous fresco is not translated literally into Albanian. It is given "*Gjykimi Universal*" and not "*Gjykimi i fundit*" as the names suggests.

In this case, the translator should have possibly taken into consideration the original title of the fresco in Italian "*Il Giudizio Universale*" as the Albanian translation seems to be a literal translation of the Italian name of this fresco, not the English one, which is mentioned in Brown's *Angels and Demons*.

An original way of translation can be found on the translation of the "*The Penitent Magdane*" - "*Madalena Pendestare*". A literal translation of the English adjective "*penitent*" into Albanian should be "*i/e penduar*". But in the Contemporary Albanian Language Dictionary [7 "*Fjalor i Shqipes së Sotme*", (2002) *Akademia e Shkencave të Shqipërisë, Instituti i Gjuhësisë dhe Letërsisë, Botimet Toena, Tiranë* ], can be found two adjectives which render the meaning of "petinent". They are "*i/e penduar*" and "*pendestar/e*."

The second one "*pendestar/e*.", used by the translator is a more figurative adjective than the first one, thus being more suitable in the translation of literary works. This Albanian adjective in the religious context *refers to the person who confesses to the priest for the sins he has committed against god or religion* [8. *Fjalor i Shqipes së Sotme*", (2002) *Akademia e Shkencave të Shqipërisë, Instituti i Gjuhësisë dhe Letërsisë, Botimet Toena, Tiranë* ].

Taking into consideration the position of Maria Magdalena in the Biblical history as described in *The Da Vinci Code* where she is considered a sinner, the adjective "*pendestare*" used by the translator instead of the literal translation "*e penduar*" seems more suitable stylistically and figuratively. A good choice made by the translator, which shows his in-depth knowledge of the Albanian language which seems to provide him with the proper word in the proper context.

The painting "The Adoration of the Magi" is the name traditionally given to the Christian subject in the Nativity of Jesus in art in which the three Magi, represented as kings, especially in the West, having found Jesus by following a star, lay before him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and worship him.

[9. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoration\\_of\\_the\\_Magi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoration_of_the_Magi)]. To translate it into Albanian the translator translates the word *adoration* and transliterates the word *Maggi*. But he does not give any explanation, neither in the context, nor in the footnotes about the symbolism of this painting.

"Venus de Milo", *or Aphrodite of Milos*, is an ancient Greek statue and one of the most famous works of ancient Greek sculpture. Created sometime between 130 and 100 BC, it is believed to depict Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and beauty (Venus to the Romans). It is a marble sculpture, slightly larger than life size at 203 cm (6 ft 8 in) high.

[10. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus\\_de\\_Milo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus_de_Milo)]. The method used for the translation of such a title into Albanian is again the transliteration of the term.

The above mentioned works of art are not so well-known into Albanian culture, and logically, I think this is the reason why he prefers to transliterate the original names without trying to domesticate the terms. This solution seems right as it does not mislead the readers into confusing cultural elements and everyone who wants to know more about these works of art can check in different sites or encyclopedias.

In the translation of the term “*A Caravaggio*” with the noun phrase “*një pikturë të Caravaggios*”, the translator preserves the name of the artist as it is in the original without transliterating it according to the rules of the Albanian spelling, but by just adding the genitive case inflection which is very important in Albanian contrary to English language, where case does not play any important role. The case inflections distinguish the grammatical and syntactic function of nouns in Albanian language, thus it cannot be avoided.

A problem related to the previous example “*A Caravaggio*”, is the recent big debate into Albanian language about how to deal with the spelling of English proper names, whether to write them as they are in English (which is considered wrong in general by Albanian linguists and scholars), or to transliterate them according to the rules of the Albanian language spelling. Unfortunately, there is not a clear-cut answer on this issue and the debate still continues, thus not providing strict guidelines about what is right and what is wrong to do. Even in the translation of the proper names found in these novels, the translator has used various ways: transliterating them, leaving them as they are in English, or sometimes giving even the Albanian equivalents of certain Biblical names and not only, thus domesticating the terms.

A translation problem seems to be imposed for the translator by the title of the famous painting “*Maddona of the Rocks*”. The translator gives two translations of the same title. In some cases he uses the literal translation of the painting “*Madonna of the Rocks*”, -“*Virgjëresha e Shkëmbinjve*”, and in some others the domestication of the term “*Zonja e Shkëmbinjve*”, by avoiding the transliteration of the term “*Shën Mëria e Shkëmbinjve*”. The question which logically arises here is what is the right translation for the previous title and is it right to translate it in two different ways?

Although the domesticated term “*Zonja e Shkëmbinjve*” refers to Maddonna or Saint Mary in Albanian religious terms, I suggest that it would have been better if the translator used one and the same translation throughout the book to refer to this painting. Translating the title in two different ways, gives the readers the impression that they have to do with two different paintings. In my view, this choice does not seem appropriate in this context.

Another remark can be done concerning the translation of “*A dominating fifteen-foot Botticelli*” which in Albanian is given simply “*një pikturë e Botticellit*”. The English version implies two main ideas: first, the painting is hanged in a higher position compared to the visitor’s position; second, the painting has big dimensions, so that it imposes itself in the area where it is exhibited. These qualities have lost in the Albanian translation and the translator just gives it “*një pikturë e Botticellit*” which if we translate into English means simply “*a picture of Boticelli*”.

Taking into consideration that the majority of Albanian readers are not supposed to know that an English foot is equal to 30.48 cm, it is hard in this context to ensure a proper decoding of the message. It seems as the translator might have found himself in the dilemma whether to express the measurements of the painting in centimeter (according to our culture), or in feet (to preserve the original cultural elements). This may be one of the reasons why the translator has decided to avoid the measures of the painting into Albanian. Another thing which can be added for the translation of the above-mentioned example is that the translator has preserved the name of the Renaissance artist as it is in original, without transliterating the term into Albanian, but by adding the proper Albanian case inflection in this context.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion of the analysis of the above mentioned examples taken from my linguistic corpora, I can say that generally the translator has faced successfully the challenges imposed by the original for the translation of the names of paintings, frescos and pictures into Albanian. In doing so, he has used a variety of translation methods and procedures, which time and again substitute one another. The main challenge for him has been the preservation of cultural elements, and he has tried to keep them as “foreign” as he could, without trying to domesticate them every time.

The mostly used translation method is the transliteration, as the only one which preserves the cultural element as it is in the source language. Time and again in the Albanian versions of the novels the translator has explained to the readers the meaning of transliterated words by footnotes.

However, he has not provided footnotes for every word that he has transliterated into Albanian and maybe one reason is that he does not want to distract or bore the readers from reading the novels,

which are full of cultural elements, unknown new explanations of Renaissance works of arts, and Biblical stories. Other translation methods he has used are the literal one, or sometimes even domesticating the terms.

By dealing with his task successfully, the translator has acted as a bridge between the SLT and TLT, thus giving the readers a translation, which can be enjoyed for the rich and natural language he has used.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Brown, D. (2003) *"The Da Vinci Code"*, published by Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc. New York, 2003. ISBN: 1-400-7917-9.
- [2] Brown, D. (2006) *"Kodi i Da Vinçit"*, shqipëroi Amik Kasoruh, Dudaj, Tiranë, 2006.
- [3] Brown, D. (2000) *"Angels and Demons"*, published by POCKET BOOKS, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc. 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020. ISBN: 0-671-02736-0.
- [4] Brown, D. (2005), *"Engjëj dhe Djaj"* përkth. Amik Kasoruh, Botimet Dudaj, Tiranë. ISBN: 99943-33-25-9.
- [5] Eco, U. (2001). *"Experiences in Translation"* (translated by Alastair McEween), University of Toronto Press Incorporated, Printed in Canada, ISBN: 978- 0-8020-9614-2.
- [6] "Fjalor i Shqipes së Sotme", (2002) *Akademia e Shkencave të Shqipërisë, Instituti i Gjuhësisë dhe Letërsisë*, Botimet Toena, Tiranë.
- [7] Venuti, L. (1995), *"The translator's Invisibility - A history of translation"* Routledge, 11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE. ISBN:0-203-36006-0 Master e-book ISBN.
- [8] Venuti, L. (1998), *"Scandals of Translation - Towards an Ethics of Difference"*, Routledge, 11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE,. ISBN: 0-415-16929-1.

### Internet sources

- [1] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus\\_de\\_Milo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus_de_Milo) "Venusi i Milos"
- [2] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoration\\_of\\_the\\_Magi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoration_of_the_Magi)
- [3] <http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/last-judgment-sistine-chapel.html>

### AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



**Dr. Ilda Kanani** works as a full time Lecturer of Translation Studies at University of Vlora "Ismail Qemali" Albania. She has a long and successful experience (15 years) working in the academic world by combining her passion for teaching at university with her hard work for research in the academic world.

Dr. Kanani has been a student's advisor on their graduation thesis for all these years. She has attended a lot of international conferences in Albania and abroad, where she has presented different papers on academic education, mainly on her primary interest, which is translation studies. She is also author of several articles published in different international academic journals.