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## Venuti and the Ethics of Difference

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### 1. Introduction

Lawrence Venuti, a professor of English and a scholar of comparative literature at Temple University, USA, has been a household name in Translation Studies since the 1990s. He is most often cited in the context of the term pair of foreignizing and domesticating, referring to translations that are experienced as either foregrounding the foreignness of the translated text or aiming for domesticating fluency, naturalness and easy readability (e.g. Paloposki 2011). These two can be seen as opposing aesthetic choices, but one can also approach them from an ethical perspective (see also the chapter on Ethics in Berman and Meschonnic in this volume). This ethical reading is the one Venuti has himself repeatedly emphasized, but, we argue, most commentators in translation studies have largely overlooked. An extensive reading of Venuti's 1990s publications from the perspective of ethics can be found in Kaisa Koskinen's *Beyond Ambivalence* (2000); a substantive critical reading of Venuti's ethical stance, again based on his 1990s publications, is in Anthony Pym's *On Translator Ethics* (2012, 32–35). This chapter aims to provide a full overview of Venuti's thinking of ethics and translation up to 2020.

Venuti's career spans over several decades, and his theoretical thinking has evolved over time. A concrete evidence of this is his best-known book, *The Translator's Invisibility*, which has been published three times (1995, 2008, 2017), each time with revisions and additions. In the new introduction to the 2017 edition Venuti (2017, x) identifies ethics and politics as a blind spot of contemporary translation studies. He summarizes the book's foundational stance as follows:

In *Translator's Invisibility*, however, following the theoretical discourses in literary and cultural studies, ideology is conceived as an ensemble of values, beliefs, and representations that are inscribed in language without the user's awareness or control, and that maintain or challenge the hierarchies in which social groups are positioned, thereby serving the interests of specific groups. Ideology is thus indistinguishable from value judgment; it is a quintessentially political concept, and it turns the analysis of translated texts into a critique of their politics made from a different, usually opposing ideological standpoint. (Venuti 2017, ix-x)

From the inescapably ideological nature of any text it follows that there is no such thing as value-free translation, that translation is always a political act, hence the necessity for the visibility of translation and hence the need to emphasize the ethical. As each translation event also takes place within existing socio-cultural hierarchies, the asymmetries and inequities bring forth ethical considerations (Venuti 1998, 4). Venuti has argued that not only practical translation but also translation studies as a research field ultimately needs to address an *ethical* task “of developing methods of translation research and practice that describe, explain and take responsibility for the differences that translation inevitably makes.” (Venuti 2013, 34; see also the chapter on research ethics in this volume)

Embracing the above understanding of the nature of texts in his theoretical writings, Venuti himself made a decisive move away from the descriptive research tradition prevalent at the time of his early contributions in the 1990s (see also Venuti 2017, x). Indeed, he has been vocal about his preferences. Focussing on issues such as the uneven global flows of literary

influence (1998, 158–89), the invisibility of the translating agent (1995) and the ideological nature of target texts (2017, xiv), Venuti has urged his Anglo-American and international readers to cultivate attitudes hospitable towards foreign literary influences, with the overall calling to contribute to more democratic cultural relations (1995, 20; 1998, 25; see also Koskinen 2000, 109). This, according to Venuti, is best achieved by favouring the foreignizing end of the translation spectrum—by making bold source text choices, by mobilizing the linguistic resources of the target language to resist any homogenizing influences, and by giving the readers of the translation the possibility to experience moments of alienation and to recognize the translatorial interventions. What Venuti argues for as a translation scholar he has also put to practice as a literary translator of Italian and Catalan poetry and fiction. This translation practice has also been made visible via a number of essays detailing his own translation decisions (e.g. 2013, Ch. 3 and 4).

As Venuti's theoretical contributions have gained prominence in translation studies, some of the nuances of his thinking have perhaps been lost. Domesticating and foreignizing are often understood as simply referring to literal versus free translation strategies, a technicality measurable by calculating the distances and degrees of equivalence between source text expressions and their counterparts in the target text (see e.g. Van Poucke 2012; Penttilä and Muikku-Werner 2012). The more complex theoretical frameworks of poststructuralist thinking and hermeneutic interpretation (Venuti 1992, 2019a) that are developed to account for translators' decision-making are seldom brought to bear on the analysis of the translated works under study by other scholars adopting his terminology, and his other concepts pertaining to ethical issues, such as resistant translation or the ethics of location, have received much less attention than domesticating and foreignizing. In this chapter we aim to both give prominence to the notion of ethics of location and to discuss the ethical

undercurrent that spans across Venuti's theorizing, the ethics of difference that has been central to his career.

## 2. Historical trajectory

In the 1990s, the budding discipline of translation studies found inspiration in a number of critical theories of the time, including post-structuralist, postcolonial and feminist theories (see also the chapters on Derrida and Ricoeur, the Ethics of Postcolonial Translation, and Feminist Translation Ethics in this volume). Lawrence Venuti's edited volume *Rethinking Translation. Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology* (1992) was one of the new voices in the field, forwarding a "philosophical, but also political" rethinking of what translation is and entails, and introducing in one book authors such as Lori Chamberlain, Richard Jacquemond, Suzanne Jill Levine, Sherry Simon and many others whose work soon became widely known and appreciated in the field. The collection contains many seeds of what later became dominant in Venuti's theorization: The opening sentence of the introduction (1992, 1) states that "translation continues to be an invisible practice," eclipsing its "linguistic, cultural, institutional and political" determinations and effects. Fluency is identified as a root problem (4), and deconstructive poststructuralism is identified as a groundwork for a method of reading translations. The translation hermeneutic he proposed would consist of 1) comparisons of the source and target texts to reveal the translator's strategy and translation effects, 2) examination of the internal discontinuities and complementarities in the translation, and 3) ideological and institutional determinations of the translation, situating it in its historical and cultural context (10).

The three steps do not necessarily appear too radical, and indeed the descriptive translation studies paradigm (see also the chapter on Literary Translator Ethics in this volume) followed a fairly similar pattern. The difference lies in the postmodern philosophy that is particularly visible in step 2: the vocabulary of "discontinuities" and "supplementarities" is quite Derridean, and it is decisively non-negative in tone. The translator's agency is emphasized, and fidelity is only evoked in its abusive form. The term "abusive fidelity" had been introduced by Philip E. Lewis (1985) in the context of the English translation of Derrida's famous essay on translation *Des Tours De Babel* (see also the chapter on Derrida and Ricoeur in this volume), and it hailed the reproductive power of "strong, forceful translation that values experimentation, tampers with usage, seeks to match the polyvalencies or plurivocities or expressive stresses of the original by producing its own" (41). In other words, difference to the source text was not to be seen as a failure of translation. Instead, it was the prerequisite of its success.

In the edited volume of 1992 Venuti used Lewis's words to channel this kind of translation practice; in the two monographs that appeared soon after the edited volume and within a short time frame he embraced and promoted the same practice by developing his own argumentation. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (1995) is a lengthy exposé of the rise of fluency (and its sidekick invisibility of translator) to its dominant position in Anglo-American translation tradition and a rally for alternative strategies, both those found in the margins of history and those developed through an engagement with critical theories. The last chapter is titled "Call to Action," and it pictures the dualist model Venuti has become known for in no uncertain terms:

The translator . . . *may submit to or resist* the forms, practices, and institutions that have accrued the greatest prestige and power in the translating language, with either course of action susceptible to ongoing redirection. Submission assumes an ethics of domestication at work in the translation process, locating the same in a cultural other,

pursuing a cultural narcissism that is imperialistic abroad and conservative, even reactionary, in maintaining cultural hierarchies in the receiving situation. (Venuti 2008, 266, emphasis added)

It is noteworthy that the quotation above, from the 2008 edition, explicitly talks about the *ethics* of domestication, whereas the same segment in 1995 referred to “an ideology of assimilation” (1995, 308; there are also some other revisions). In essence, the ethical undercurrent remains the same, but in the first edition it was not as clearly labelled as such. By calling translators to action, Venuti calls for a choice of resistance over submission. Resistant translation, according to Venuti, signals both cultural and linguistic differences while unsettling the hierarchies of the target context. Here, Venuti incorporates an “ethics of foreignization” (2008, 266), a term that materializes in opposition to existing canons and marginalizing practices because they only welcome those foreign texts that do not stir up any disturbances of the status quo. In this formulation, the juxtaposition of submission and resistance, while sometimes interpreted as a naïvely black and white approach, managed to catch the attention of the field through the force of an uncompromising, dichotomy-like demand.

The roots of Venuti’s approach can be tracked back to German Romanticism, and it bears resemblance to Schleiermacher’s famous essay from year 1813 (Schleiermacher 1982) on the two methods of translating and the Romantic understanding of the ethical task of translating that have greatly influenced ethical thinking in translation. It is, however, important to notice that Venuti’s theorizing is not a repetition of Schleiermacher’s thinking (see also the chapter on Ethics in Berman and Meschonnic in this volume). In *The Translator’s Invisibility* (1995, Ch. 3) Venuti offers his critical reading of Schleiermacher, noting the relevant similarities such as the praise of non-fluent translation as well as the bipolar presentation of the two

methods, but also the more crucial differences such as the cultural role and political functions of translation (see also Koskinen 2000, 48–52; Pym 2012, 32–35).

*The Translator's Invisibility* has acquired a central role in Venuti's oeuvre. It was published in a revised version in 2008, was reprinted in Routledge classics edition in 2017 and has become a standard reference in discussions about foreignization and domestication in translation studies. In his new introduction to the classics edition, Venuti comments on the fate of his ideas, and his ambivalence is tangible: all interpretations of his ideas have not been in the direction he foresaw. The second monograph, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (1998) forwards the same line of argument as *The Translator's Invisibility*, but this time focuses on the scandalous "others" of translation, looking at the publishing industry, copyright law, and the teaching of literature, among other things, to find explanations of the translator's plight. The aim, again, is to promote a rethinking of translation as an intercultural collaborative process. The book, however, also introduces a slight shift of the perspective, made visible by the introduction of a new term, minoritizing, that further highlights the national and transnational hierarchies within which the cultural differences play out (see also below). The ethics of difference is even more prominent than in his previous works as it now features in the title. The fundamental ethical position remains unchanged, and is again directed at not only translators but also at readers and scholars: "The ethical stance I advocate urges that translations be written, read, and evaluated with greater respect for linguistic and cultural differences" (Venuti 1998, 6; see also Venuti 2004). Among new concepts that fine-tune the argumentation are also the idea of the translation releasing a foreignizing remainder and the notion of the ethics of location (see also below).

The three core publications of the 1990s, and in particular the two monographs (Venuti 1995 and 1998) put forward a programmatic argument for a particular translation approach in a historical perspective and from a contemporary angle. In his later work, Venuti's style changes. *Translation changes everything: Theory and Practice* (2013) records a less activist and therefore maybe more compelling attitude. It is a collection of essays from the early 2000s, spanning from 2000 to 2012. The long time frame of his work covered in this volume provides a trajectory to how Venuti's thinking has evolved. According to his own subheadings in the introduction, the trajectory has involved "abandoning instrumentalism," "recovering history, textuality and agency," as well as "essaying a new approach."

Abandoning instrumentalism is no doubt a reaction to the often "simplistic" reception of his previous monographs (see Venuti 2017, x–xi), but it also evokes his desire to recalibrate his thinking, even if he has "no intention of abandoning the pursuit of foreignizing effects" (2013, 2). The new direction is more attuned to seeing translation as an interpretive "event," a notion which Venuti (2013, 4; see also 2010, 79) introduces from Alain Badiou's work and phrases as a translation that brings about "a linguistic and cultural difference in the institution, initiating new ways of thinking inspired by an interpretation of the source text."

This emphasis led him to develop a new approach in the form of a hermeneutic model. Recovering history, textuality and agency is at first sight an unexpected emphasis, as these are the themes that cut across Venuti's entire career, but in the context of recent comparative literature cum translation research, he (2013, 5–8) argues, they have been left aside, as sociological approaches have led to a presentist approach with limited sensitivity to historical trajectories and changing contextualizations; world literature approaches have reverted to distant reading strategies (Moretti 2000), and the vogue of habitus-related research, he argues, has not brought much enlightenment to the agency of the translator. The new approach, then, presents the case for the above-mentioned hermeneutic model. Ethics is the



topic of one chapter; throughout the chapters it is present implicitly, although not extensively discussed in a manner similar to how it was done in his earlier works from the 1990s. As a concrete evidence of its background role, ethics is also not indexed in the book.

The latest publications, the book *Contra Instrumentalism: A Translation Polemic* (2019a) and the pamphlet *Theses on Translation: An Organon for the Current Moment* (2019b) were both published the same year, and their titles highlight the new urgency of Venuti's writing. In the present moment, Venuti seems to argue, the long-lived concept of translation that builds on an instrumentalist understanding of translating, and the related faith in the underlying invariant that can and should be preserved in translation, are particularly misguided and harmful. Instrumental translation that aims at transferring the invariant content, meaning or effect of the source text needs to give way to a hermeneutic model of translation that acknowledges the transformative power of translation:

Translation is imitative yet transformative. It can and routinely does establish a semantic correspondence and a stylistic approximation to the source text. But these relations can never give back that text intact. Any text is a complex cultural artifact, supporting meanings, values, and functions that are indivisible from its originary language and culture. Translation interprets a source-text process of signification and reception by creating another such process, supporting meanings, values, and functions that are indivisible from the translating language and culture. Change is unavoidable. (Venuti 2019b, 8)

The hermeneutic model, in other words, takes us back to the ethics of difference. Any translation process evokes, consciously or unconsciously, a number of interpretants, some of them dominant in the target culture, others marginal. Dominant interpretants assimilate the translation; marginal interpretants construct certain images of the foreign (Venuti 2008, 19–20) into it. Venuti argues that the ethics of difference dictates that promoting marginal interpretants is ethical as it questions the canonical and assimilationist interpretations, while promoting dominant interpretants “can be” unethical as it may lead to suppressing difference (15–16). The urgency of recent publications comes from what Venuti perceives as a

reinforced global tendency towards fluent translation language in all genres (2019b, 16).

Instead, translators should “show respect for the source text by cultivating innovation in the translating language and culture” (17).

### **3. Core issues and topics**

What most profoundly ties Venuti’s works to questions of translation ethics is the very starting point of his approach, the view that translation is always imbalanced in some way: the inevitably assimilationist nature of translation always exploits foreign texts for domestic purposes, and the sites of translation are never neutral (Venuti 1998, 4, 11). This inherent inequality is manifested in how the two sides of translation, the translating and the translated culture, differ from each other both in terms of language and culture and their political and economic statuses, and how these global positions affect both the motives for and opportunities in translation (158–59, 188). According to Venuti, the effects of translated texts have major ethical implications. This is particularly evident in Venuti’s repeated stress on the importance of registering linguistic and cultural differences and the history of suppressing those differences, most often through discussing Anglophone translation traditions. On a more global scale, the power of translation in constructing representations of foreign cultures (67) highlights the urgency of ethics in translation.

Venuti’s work revolves around the question of ethics through a number of concepts. Among them, his first key term may be considered the one in the title of his first monograph (1995), the invisibility of translators – and translations. The multifaceted nature of invisibility masks both the work of the translator and the status of the translation as a foreign-origin text. It impedes any recognition of differences by depriving them of visibility, and therefore turns

translations into something that merely appears from an imposed sameness (see Venuti 1998, 188), as if there never was a foreign text that differed from those native to the target culture. Closely intertwined with this type of invisibility, another term that carries through all Venuti's major works is fluency, which he criticizes because of the narrow sense in which it is typically understood (see Venuti 2013, 2). A fluent translation is made to appear as an original work, thus creating an illusion of a text that has not been translated. Through techniques routinely expected of translators, such as the current standard dialect, linear syntax and univocal meaning, the translator produces an illusion of originality, of an invisible translation that "creates an easy readability that masks the translator's work, leading the reader to believe that the translation is actually the source text" (Venuti 2017, iix). Fluency means familiarity, and fluency enables the target society to ignore and suppress the differences. For Venuti, fluency and invisibility represent wide-ranging translation characteristics that favour the dominant and dismiss the marginal. They are key features of domesticated translations, which maintain established hierarchies and institutionalize certain values while suppressing others. Foreignization, on the contrary, opposes this understanding of fluency that limits the translator's choices to those defined by the current canon as standard language use (Venuti 1998, 99; 2013, 2). It opposes easy, uncomplicated readability and is almost forceful in attempting to make the translation visible in order to dispel the illusion of originality and to expose the reader to the conditions in which translation takes place. The micro- and macro-level strategies translators choose affect the cross-cultural relations to which their translations contribute. In Venuti's thinking, translation wields enormous power. It indeed has the dynamics to change everything.

As mechanisms affecting this potential for change, both fluency and invisibility play a central part in the famous term duo domestication and foreignization. While the origins of this scale

with two opposing ends lie deeper than the 1990s (see above), Venuti is generally considered the translation scholar whose critical writings gave these terms the prominent status they now enjoy within translation studies. And while the critical nature of Venuti's works is recognized in the discipline, the applications of these terms in translation research do not necessarily reflect their connection to the ethical implications of fluency and invisibility, which in Venuti's argumentation are crucial for all pores of society. These implications entail translation's potential to feature in questions ranging from geopolitical conflicts and colonialism to confrontations between literary canons through which dominant and marginal cultural discourses may rival. Furthermore, translation can maintain or revise the foundational frameworks of all fields by affecting the formation and development of conceptual paradigms, research methodologies and clinical practices (Venuti 1995, 19). Due to these multifaceted effects, Venuti maintains that the concepts of domestication and foreignization represent profoundly ethical attitudes (e.g. 2008, 19), which, as very comprehensive approaches, echo all aspects of translation. In this view, domestication not only makes a text more approachable and easier to read but also pursues a strategy that assimilates a foreign text into the translating culture's dominant values, thereby both suppressing the status of the source culture and reinforcing that of the target culture, and subduing more marginal values within the target culture itself. Accordingly, the objective of foreignizing translation is not solely to maintain (or create) foreignness but to resist assimilation and suppression by deviating from what is currently canonical in the target culture, unsettling the prevailing *doxa*. In other words, foreignization aims to break dominant patterns in the receiving situation. Venuti's foundational stance is that these patterns need to be disrupted or replaced precisely *because of* their dominance, to create a more democratic, more multivoiced society.

Venuti offers his readers little in terms of hands-on translation solutions that would fall into categories such as fluent or domesticating, let alone visible or foreignizing translation. He does exemplify the use of foreignization through textual choices such as transferring source-text elements to the translation unchanged or as calque renderings (Venuti 1998, 16, 85) and utilizing linguistic diversity by incorporating nonstandard items, including different dialects or vocabulary typical of different time periods (126–27, 145). These minor linguistic variables Venuti calls the remainder—a term he borrows from Jean-Jacques Lecercle—emphasizing their resistance to the creation of any systematic rules (10; see also Lecercle 1990). The effects of these choices are therefore not presented as generalizable, and a particular choice may contribute to a domesticating effect in one context while promoting foreignization in another. Yet this lack of ready-made classifications or typologies is by no means a sign of any inapplicability of Venuti’s writing. Instead, this air of abstractness can be seen to emphasize the notion of ethical attitudes and evaluations, as approaches like this are always situation-specific. In other words, rather than resorting to static categorizations of particular techniques as foreignizing (e.g. calque) or domesticating (e.g. locally sourced terminology), one needs to look at the context of production, the cultural power relations involved and the affective climate of the reception before assessing what is known and familiar and what is not (Koskinen 2012). Venuti emphasizes that “[t]he terms “domesticating” and “foreignizing” do not describe specific verbal choices or discursive strategies used in translation, but rather the ethical effects of translated texts that depend for their force and recognition on the receiving culture” (Venuti 2017, xiii). The 2017 introduction, while clarifying many of the arguments from almost a quarter century ago, still avoids instrumentalization and underlines an understanding of these terms that goes beyond the level of a single text.

For “domesticating” and “foreignizing” are ethical effects whereby translation establishes a performative relation both to the source text and to the receiving situation. Domesticating translation not only validates dominant resources and ideologies, but also extends their dominance over a text written in a different language and culture, assimilating its differences to receiving materials. Thus domesticating translation maintains the status quo, reaffirming linguistic standards, literary canons, and authoritative interpretations, fostering among readers who esteem such resources and ideologies a cultural narcissism that is sheer self-satisfaction. In terms of an intercultural ethics, it is bad in reinforcing the asymmetry between cultures that is inherent in translation (Venuti 2017, xiv).

Abstract as they may seem, domestication and foreignization are made more tangible by the inclusion of contextual factors. While the abstract-appearing nature of how Venuti approaches these terms may encourage translation scholars to concretize them in perhaps too simplistic ways, the importance of contexts highlights the impossibility of easy-to-use simplifications. From an ethical perspective they are not abstract but dynamic, and hence contingent upon complex hierarchies and imbalances that uncover the ethical underpinning of translation issues (Venuti 2008, 19, 273; see also Laaksonen 2020). The term pair “should never be treated as labels that are affixed to translations merely on the strength of the discursive strategies they implement,” (Venuti 2017, xvi) as this would impede examinations of their ethical significance. For an ethics of difference, “the key issue is not simply a discursive strategy (fluent or resistant), but always its intention and effect as well . . .” (Venuti 1998, 188), and these are things that cannot be studied from source and target texts separated from source and target contexts.

How to recognize or evaluate, then, the Venutian versions of domestication and foreignization? From a translation scholar it requires familiarity with both source and target contexts, the latter of which is especially emphasized because the ethical layer is only visible to someone who understands target-context interpretations. Moreover, these understandings

need to be situated in the specific context of each translation. What makes this a demanding task is that

[t]he contexts of production and reception may be riven with conflicts and contradictions that outstrip the translator's conscious control and complicate the ethical effect of the translation. Still, these contexts need to be reconstructed in a nuanced form because they are the key factors in any evaluation. What hangs in the balance is an understanding of the ethics of an intercultural relation and its potential cultural and social consequences. (Venuti 2008, 268)

The scholar thus needs to identify, with critical self-reflection (see Venuti 2019b, 6–7), the “dominant resources and ideologies, which because of their very dominance are likely to be immediately accessible, familiar, possibly assuring” that define domestication, as well as the “marginal resources and ideologies, which because of their very marginality may be less readily comprehensible, somewhat peculiar, and even estranging” that foreignizing translation draws on (Venuti 2017, xiv–xvi). In terms of textual choices, domestication uses linguistic and cultural material conventional in the dominant culture, referring to generally accepted values and using predictable word choices along with idiomatic structures, whereas foreignizing translation seeks ways to derive meanings from outside the prevailing canon and remind the reader of the text's foreign origin by deviating from the expected, fluent language use (Venuti 2008, 47; 2009, 165). However, Venuti urges translators to consider their work beyond the discursive level in order to engage in a consideration of intercultural ethics (Venuti 2008, 268; 2017, xiv), a term that integrates the contrast between locations with an ethics of cultural difference. For instance, the further away the source and target contexts are from each other in the cultural and linguistic hierarchies, the more pressing are the ethical implications of translation.

In his second monograph, Venuti (1998) introduced the term “minoritizing,” a parallel idea to foreignizing translation. While building on the same basis as foreignizing, minoritizing appeared perhaps less strict in its applications and more ethical in its implications. The new

word also tilts the emphasis away from the foreign elements already to be found in the source text, and more to the direction of what is minoritized in the target context. This shift is consistent with the softening of attitude towards the extent of foreignization promoted. If *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995) was almost aggressive in urging translators to unsettle their readers, *The Scandals of Translation* (1998) appeared more cautious not to turn the use of this translation approach against itself. This change of tone is illustrated in how Venuti formulates his approach:

I want to suggest that insofar as foreignizing translation seeks to restrain the ethnocentric violence of translation, it is highly desirable today, a strategic cultural intervention in the current state of world affairs, pitched against the hegemonic English-language nations and the unequal cultural exchanges in which they engage their global others. (Venuti 1995, 20) The goal [of minoritizing translation] is ultimately to alter reading patterns, compelling a *not unpleasurable* recognition of translation among constituencies who, while possessing different cultural values, nonetheless share a long-standing unwillingness to recognize it. (Venuti 1998, 13, emphasis added)

Minoritizing still focuses on bold moves and experimental translations, but here Venuti suggests what appears a more careful use of minority elements, both cultural and linguistic, to a strategic extent that does not impede readability at the cost of losing the reader (1998, 12–15, 120–23). Therefore, even minoritizing approaches need to adapt to a commercial reality, as they cannot achieve their ethical objectives in case they repel the translation's audience. The skill is to push the readers towards favouring difference while not alienating them with too much of it. The core ethical objective is emphasized by the term itself: in imbalanced settings where the dominant impedes advancements of the marginal, we need to look out for the minority side. Foreignizing and minoritizing offer ways to contribute to an ethics of difference. The differences that tend to get repressed in translation are those that derive from minority situations, marginal elements and a non-acknowledgement of the very source text should it originate in a minority context. The ethical layer surpasses the discursive strategies. Domesticating choices aim to inscribe the translated culture with the translating culture's



values by building on a continuity of pre-existing practises in the receiving situation (Venuti 1998, 11; 2009, 157). A close adherence to the source text will only be foreignizing if it resists this aim, and fluency will only act on domestication's behalf if it contributes to the goal of assimilation. For example, exoticizing translation strategies may well flaunt the foreign origin of the translation while firmly conforming to a pre-existing schema of reception in the target culture (e.g. orientalism). The superficial use of foreign references, for example by sprinkling the text with loan words, does not produce a foreignizing effect if it does not upset the target values; instead, it may even underpin a "shallow sense of the foreign" if that is what the readers have learned to expect (Venuti 2008, 160).

A foreignizing strategy, in contrast, "can be called "resistancy," not just because the strategy results in a translation that demands greater and possibly unexpected cognitive processing from the reader, but also because it questions the dominant resources and ideologies that are put to work in domesticating translation" (Venuti 2017, xv). This "resistancy" is thus directed against those who use translation for majority interests and canonization (Venuti 2008, 266). It seeks to challenge cultural and social hierarchies in the target context, stimulate new responses, instigate cultural shifts, and "change or consolidate literary canons, conceptual paradigms, research methodologies, clinical techniques, and commercial practices in the domestic culture" (Venuti 1998, 68, 82; 2017, xiv). Most importantly, resistancy aims to unmask the asymmetries that, if we accept the foundation of Venuti's thinking, underlie all translation projects. The opportunities of this approach lie in the idea that if translation is able to reinforce the dominant, it also has the potential to disrupt the hierarchy and to bring forward the marginal (Venuti 1998, 158).

Although this cluster of concepts—invisibility, fluency, domestication and foreignization, minoritization, resistancy—forms the best-known and most-cited part of Venutian terminology, and it unquestionably builds one comprehensive approach as such, the ethical underpinning may not always be unfolded in applications. The asymmetries, imbalances and hierarchies that are built in and shaped by each translation context may be overlooked. Venuti emphasizes the necessity of also focusing on the many case studies his books display. It is in the context of individual cases, embedded in specific cultural situations at specific historical moments and interwoven with textual analyses and archival evidence, that the dynamic nature of these concepts comes to light (Venuti 2017, xi). What is foreignizing in one culture and language pair today may not have a similar effect in the same text's translation to a different context or at a different time. A vital part of this ethical approach, then, is conducting not only comparisons of source and target texts but also comprehensive evaluations of the social, cultural and political contexts in which they are made. The ethical attitudes present in domesticating and foreignizing translation do not manifest themselves in the actual texts only: the significance of textual choices “is deepened when they are situated in broader contexts, including other translations from the source language, original compositions in the translating language, and global hierarchies of languages and cultures” (Venuti 2019b, 21). An examination inspired by Venuti's concepts will closely look at the initial positions of the source and target culture, especially in relation to each other, as well as the circumstances in which a text is chosen to be translated, financed and published. This examination does not stop at the translation but continues to see which attitudes are detectable in its reviews (e.g. Venuti 2008, 1). The acknowledgement of these questions wraps domestication and foreignization in an ethical layer that reflects the asymmetry of the setting: translation has dominant and subordinate constituents, and the ethics of difference is

not so much tied to a certain strategy but contingent upon the location of the employer of the strategy.

Venuti's main empirical thesis lies within the translation practices of Anglophone, especially Anglo-American cultural contexts. Through extensive examples (Venuti 1995, 1998), he demonstrates the ways in which domesticating translation is used as a distributor of (major) Anglophone cultural values and a suppressor of (minor) non-Anglophone cultures that do not get a say in how they are represented in translations that aim to deliver all things familiar. On a more general level, this can be seen as part of Venuti's criticism towards the use of domestication for maintaining linguistic and cultural hegemonies. Translation indeed tends to be harnessed as a way to exploit foreign texts for the benefit of domestic cultural agendas and used as an opportunity to neglect the value of foreign traditions (Venuti 1998, 4, 71–72, 130–31). However, the examination of locations and contexts questions the simplification more or less explicitly present in Venuti's first monograph (1995) that “domestic” would always equal “major,” or that the “foreign” in translation would automatically mean the “minor” constituent. Instead, as he later fine-tuned this positioning, “minority situations redefine what constitutes the ‘domestic’ and the ‘foreign.’ These two categories are variable, always reconstructed in a translation project *vis-à-vis* the local scene” (Venuti 1998, 187). In line with this, Venuti (2008, 19–20) has later drawn attention to the existence of hierarchies even *within* minority contexts: a shared subordinate position in the global hierarchy of languages and cultures is by no means a guarantee of equality in such context. The major constituent of a translation project, then, is the one in a position of power, be it linguistic, cultural and/or economic. The major party, which typically is the translating one in the applications and adaptations of Venuti's work, holds a status that allows it to define the conditions of a translation project. It may decide what it chooses to import into its culture and how the source

context is treated in this process, i.e. its preferred degrees of domestication and foreignization.

Venuti's positioning of his argument specifically within the Anglo-American cultural context is often overlooked in critiques of his theorizing. The global dominance of the English language and American culture create a particular hegemonic situation within which Venuti's argumentation is explicitly and implicitly situated, and it is against this set-up that his favouring of foreignization needs to be assessed: it is because of this hierarchical imbalance, and because of the reluctance of the Anglo-American sphere to open up to literary works in foreign languages and cultures, that he encourages translators to make themselves visible and to produce unsettling and non-fluent translations. This kind of situatedness of the translator, the translation and translational micro-decisions, and the ensuing ethical reasoning of best practice, is at the core of Venuti's ethical thinking. In the second monograph, he labels this the ethics of location (Venuti 1998, 186–89).

The ethics of location connects to a variety of motivations and rationales: the translator into a minor language can stimulate its cultural development through an engagement with major cultures whereas the translator into a major language can interrogate its dominance by admitting new languages and cultures to bear on it (Venuti 2019b, 20). The redefinitions instigated by majority and minority contexts also offer a way for minor constituents to strengthen their positions, and this may well be performed via strategies often labelled as domesticating (see Venuti 2013, 117). Hence, an ethical reading of Venuti appears as a balance between the empirical foundation of his approach, his often-uncompromising views on domesticating effects, and the ways in which he emphasizes the redefinitions of his terms in different hierarchical situations:

[A]lthough my project focuses on Anglophone cultures and their translation histories, fluency based on the current standard dialect is a discursive regime that dominates translation worldwide, regardless of the translating language and its position in the global hierarchy of symbolic and cultural capital. It is not only major languages like English and French, then, that practice domesticating translation, fostering cultures that are ripe for foreignizing effects. Minor languages also erect hierarchies of cultural resources and ideologies that can lead to domesticating translation, inviting the development of foreignizing projects that both interrogate those hierarchies and build the translating language and culture through innovative practices. (Venuti 2017, xvi)

Ethics of location is the term that most explicitly ties together Venuti's network of interlinked terms and the often-overlooked foundational ethical layer of his work. Ethics of location is, in different and sometimes rather implicit ways, present in both foreignizing and minoritizing through their objective of balancing or reversing unequal and asymmetric situations.

Minoritizing, in particular, re-steers the focus from questions of source versus target elements to the question of who are minority and who majority, and what is dominant or marginal.

Hence, it reconstructs resistancy and assimilation, and re-emphasizes understanding domestication and foreignization as ethical effects, not textual practices: translations that challenge the dominant contribute to a foreignizing effect even if their resources inevitably originate in the domestic context, and translations that reinforce the existing canon contribute to a domesticating effect regardless of how many (superficially) foreign-origin textual elements they employ.

Yet, translation is not an either-or phenomenon. It is not either domesticating or foreignizing, nor is it either assimilating or resistant. Venuti explicitly refuses the use of his term pairs as "a neat binary opposition that can simply be superimposed on 'fluent' or 'resistant' discursive strategies" (2008, 19). The interrelations of these term pairs are, in practice, continuums or scales rather than dichotomies or completely separate boxes. They are illustrative in demonstrating the underlying ethical questions, given that their use succumbs to one presupposition: that all translation is inherently domesticating (Venuti 1998, 5; 2017, xii–xiii)

and “fundamentally assimilationist” (Venuti 2019b, 6). Translation will always use domestic linguistic and cultural materials for whatever it constructs:

[A]ny sense of foreignness in a translation can never be more than a construction overdetermined by the receiving situation: it is not the foreignness of the source text itself, but rather a *foreignism* that is, moreover, subject to variation, depending on the changing cultural situations and historical moments of various interpreters and translators. (Venuti 2017, xiii, original emphasis)

Foreignizing translation is thus always built from the resources of the receiving situation. In this regard, Venuti has sometimes been perceived as eager to reduce the features of the source text and manifestations of the source culture to a strategic tool (Paloposki and Oittinen 2000, 374) that is used in an instrumentalist way, dismissing the intrinsic value of the translated culture in case its characteristics are not capable of unsettling the target-culture readers. Hence, the source text is always harnessed to support an agenda: domestication uses (and assimilates) what it needs from the foreign text for its own purposes, whereas foreignization only picks out those qualities that can be used in its quest for resistancy. While this aspect of Venuti’s writing clearly offsets the simplistic idea of foreignization as inherently ethical, it is also an invitation, or even a request, to another ethical reflection: by acknowledging that “foreign” is always only constructed as “not familiar,” we acknowledge how the assimilationist nature of translation requires considering an ethics of difference. What may be foreign is always only different if it deviates from what the receiving situation expects and is accustomed to read, and what may be different is only ever different if it survives a comparison with the standard, the canonical.

#### **4. Emerging issues**

In contrast to the previous section, where the core concepts of Venuti’s theorizing are fairly easy to identify and have been developed across his career, the question of emerging issues is

more difficult to answer. While foreignization and domestication, in particular, have become stable elements in the collective mental imagery of translation studies, readily employed by students to explain their translation strategies and scholars to classify their translation data, recent developments in the form of critical reassessment or re-appropriation have been sparse. Venuti's concepts of domesticating and foreignizing have indeed been hugely successful in translation studies, and they have begun to live their own life, and as has been discussed above, Venuti's quite open-ended notion of the two translation methods is at risk of being subsumed to fixed classifications. The issue that would need to emerge is to whether and to what extent this tendency to resort to fixed categorizations has had and will have consequences to how the ethical base of Venuti's approach is understood and applied.

Venuti's own project is an evolving one. His most recent work (Venuti 2019ab) responds to the more instrumentalist applications of his concepts by underlining the interpretive aspects of translation and working towards a hermeneutic model that would allow translation and its analysis to be fully "contingent on specific cultural situations at specific historical moments" (Venuti 2019b, 26). This emphasis on interpretation also works as a counterargument to the growing technologization and automation of translation work, bringing to the fore the human element of assessment, evaluation and interpretation involved.

Ethics of location as a term is not the most commonly known one in Venuti's vocabulary. In the early 2000s it was briefly taken up by some scholars to discuss issues related to minor and major languages and globalization (Koskinen 2000; Apter 2001) and to draw parallels to Antoine Berman's thinking (Bandia 2001; see also the chapter on Ethics in Berman and Meschonnic in this volume), but its full potential has not perhaps been fully exploited yet, not by Venuti himself or by other scholars. The term resonates with a number of contemporary

issues, where new understandings of minority along with new conceptualizations of location spark new discussions of translation and ethics. For example, ethics of location might be fruitfully combined with the third wave feminism and new postcolonial work where the question of location can be put to play with the questions of position in society or voice of the marginalized. It also links to the question of migration and hospitality, and the loaded roles of the host and the guest (see also the chapters on Feminist Translation Ethics, Ethics of Postcolonial Translation, and Derrida and Ricoeur in this volume).

Venuti's own turf is literary translation. Although he has recently (2019a) also engaged with audio-visual translation, his approach is remarkably ageless, and he avoids taking issue with the changing technological landscape or commenting on how and whether these changes affect the hermeneutical process of translation. For others more eager to address these questions, ethics of location might offer a relevant starting point to address the effects of increasing virtuality on how translations are produced and consumed, and the new hierarchies and positions that are being created through new technological affordances. Is the geographic and cultural element of location losing relevance and are other aspects becoming more focal? In particular, does the increasing virtuality of translation and its reception change the playing field entirely, or do we only need to start paying more attention to the virtual kinds of being located?

Minoritizing is a central concept in Venuti's model. Within his Anglo-American focus it functions as a tool for creating ripples of marginalization in a hegemonic culture. As has been discussed above, the functions of the familiar and the foreign are context-dependent. In an actual minority situation, the hegemonic culture and the language one is translating from may well be more familiar than the minority culture struggling for existence through translating



into an endangered language. The number of publications dealing with minority languages and translation is still fairly modest in translation studies, but there is a growing interest in this field. The ethical base of minoritizing is coloured in a new light in contexts of revitalizing an endangered language where extensive flaunting of the foreign elements is often a risky strategy, and because of the sparsity of resources the stakes in each individual translation project are high (see e.g. Kuusi, Kolehmainen, and Riionheimo 2017).

Finally, an emerging issue that may have wide repercussions to the entire field of translation studies is the recent interest in translation issues in other fields. Scholars in international business and management studies and accounting, for example, have recently started to react to the multifaceted nature of translation, a practice earlier largely taken for granted as a technical task. Along with a wider recognition of translation's implications, questions of cultural imbalances, translator's agency and translation ethics have emerged in different contexts. Venuti's terms have found new resonance in these novel contexts as scholars have employed them, among other translation studies approaches, to understand their particular research questions: they have been utilized to add ethical nuances to issues of research methodology/settings (Chidlow, Plakoyiannaki, and Welch 2014; Kamla and Komori 2018), and they have been built into frameworks that give new, critical insights into non-literary translation projects (Laaksonen 2020; Lessig 2019; Piekkari, Tietze, and Koskinen 2019). The promise of this interdisciplinary activity is that it testifies to a maturity of the discipline of translation studies in that it can productively lend theories and concepts to other fields. The risk lies in that the widespread instrumentalization of Venuti's concepts may easily be transferred to these other fields, for the sake of simplicity, and the more destabilizing ethical, political and interpretive aspects of Venuti's thinking that would enrich the analysis may go undetected.

## 5. Conclusion

Undeniably, “Venuti has been a pioneer in opening up the field of translation studies to questions of cultural identity, the marketing of bestsellers, the status of minority languages, and the impact of globalization” (Apter 2001, 6). In current discussions, Venuti is much more side-lined than at the turn of the millennium. The rapid industrialization of the translation field has moved attention to translation technology, and literary translation, which is the domain most associate Venuti’s work with, has lost much of its earlier prominence. Still, Venuti was the first to raise many issues that are at the heart of current ethical dilemmas in the society and for those involved in translatorial activities, and his recent work continues to go to the heart of what human translation is (see Venuti 2019a, 2019b).

Venuti’s major—and most-cited—terms have stood the test of time and resonate with a number of contemporary issues, which is no wonder given that already in 1995 Venuti founded his statement on the accelerating globalization that necessitated a different look on translation. At the turn of the decade into the 2020s, understandings of domestic and foreign may be subject to constant change while impressions of fluent or resistant succumb to situations where mutual familiarity can reach across the globe in a heartbeat. Yet, conceptualizations of translation as domesticating or foreignizing remain appealing and undeniably relevant, as inevitable redefinitions of location and situatedness gain ground. The accelerated global communication has by no means diminished Venuti’s foundation: translation both produces and reveals imbalances, asymmetries and inequalities. Differences have not disappeared, majorities and minorities still need to negotiate their status, and democratization of cultural relations is still a worthwhile aim to pursue.

Ethics of location takes us back to the 1998 monograph, where Venuti first allocated significant attention to the term. The subtitle of the book, however, informs us of the aiming towards an ethics of difference. A way to understand these two terms is to see the ethics of difference as label that catches the foundation of Venuti's overall project; ethics of location redirects the focus to situatedness in particular. It reconstructs the domestic and the foreign from the perspective of minority and power positions. The ethical layer of Venuti's work is perhaps the one that is the least applied in translation studies and yet it is the one Venuti repeatedly emphasizes. However, turning the focus to the ethical questions deeply entangled in Venuti's writing does not imply an abandonment of his widely circulated terms, such as the duo of domesticating and foreignizing translation. Instead, it instigates a more ethical use of these terms and their implications in different contexts. It pushes translation scholars to engage in holistic, hermeneutic evaluations of translation events. Moreover, it urges translators into context-specific and dynamic considerations of any hierarchies that different choices and practices in translation may sustain or unsettle, and challenges readers into self-critical reflections on how they react to translations. The continued relevance of Venuti's seminal work lies in our ability and willingness to deepen our use of terms like domestication and foreignization by integrating them with the ethical questions of difference and location.

### **Related topics in this volume**

Ethics in Berman and Meschonnic; The Ethics of Postcolonial Translation; Feminist Translation Ethics; The Ethics of Linguistic Hospitality and Untranslatability in Derrida and Ricoeur

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- Venuti, Lawrence. 2019a. *Contra Instrumentalism. A Translation Polemic*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Venuti, Lawrence. 2019b. "Theses on Translation: An Organon for the Current Moment." *Flugschriften* 5, September 2019. <https://flugschriften.com/2019/09/15/thesis-on-translation/>

## Further reading

- Venuti, Lawrence. 2017. *The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation* (Routledge Translation Classics edition). London and New York: Routledge.

While it is recommendable to read all three editions, if you really want to engage with the development of Venuti's argumentation, or if you only read one of the three, we suggest the latest edition. It contains a new introduction, helping the readers to put the ideas forwarded in a broader perspective and spelling out many core arguments in a clear and concise manner.

- Venuti, Lawrence. 2013. "Introduction." In *Translation changes everything. Theory and Practice*. London and New York: Routledge.

This collection of articles is worthwhile reading in its entirety, but the Introduction in particular is a fairly accessible way to acquaint yourself with Venuti's main theses. It also provides a demonstrative presentation of the development and new turns of his arguments after the two major works of the 1990s.

Venuti, Lawrence. 1998. *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*. London and New York: Routledge.

Although Venuti has since developed, reformulated and fine-tuned his positioning, many foundational elements of his ethical argumentation are first discussed at length in this 1998 monograph. They are recommended for (re-)reading as the past two decades have brought about new aspects of global 'differences' and 'locations', the two key ethical notions in this book. Many topics such as copyright issues and institutional and cultural hegemonies have lost none of their relevance, although our social, cultural and technological context has changed dramatically over the past decades.

Venuti, Lawrence. 2019. "Theses on Translation: An Organon for the Current Moment." *Flugschriften* 5, September 2019. <https://flugschriften.com/2019/09/15/thesis-on-translation/>

A short programmatic text available on-line, providing an accessible gateway to Venuti's recent thinking. Due to the polemical style of the publication, many central tenets of his ethical thinking are strongly formulated.