

# **Seamus Heaney and his Translation of *Beowulf*: Strategies for Simultaneously Highlighting the Source-Text and the Translator's Cultures**

## **Seamus Heaney y su traducción de *Beowulf*: estrategias para visibilizar simultáneamente la cultura del texto origen y la del traductor**

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### **Abstract**

This article consists of a comparative analysis between the original Old English manuscript of *Beowulf* and its translation into Standard English by the Irish author Seamus Heaney. It aims to show that, through the inclusion of Hiberno-English dialectal terms, Heaney's translation succeeds in 1) making visible the cultural and linguistic differences between the source-text and target-text culture; and 2) to challenge Standard English domination as a form of protest against Britain's cultural and linguistic colonizing role over Ireland. The analysis focuses on identifying the translation strategies employed according to the classifications provided by Aixelá (1996) and Bastin (1998) and determining how they meet the goals of Heaney's task as a translator.

**Keywords:** translation; *Beowulf*; Seamus Heaney; foreignization; domestication

### **Resumen**

Este artículo consiste en un análisis comparado entre el manuscrito original en inglés antiguo de *Beowulf* y su traducción al inglés estándar del autor irlandés Seamus Heaney. El objetivo es demostrar que, a través de la inclusión de términos dialectales del hiberno-

inglés, la traducción de Heaney consigue 1) visibilizar las diferencias culturales y lingüísticas entre la cultura del texto fuente y la del texto meta; y 2) desafiar la dominación del inglés estándar como forma de protesta contra el papel colonizador cultural y lingüístico de Gran Bretaña sobre Irlanda. El análisis se centra en identificar las estrategias de traducción empleadas según las clasificaciones proporcionadas por Aixelá (1996) y Bastin (1998) y en determinar cómo se ajustan a los objetivos de la tarea de Heaney como traductor.

**Palabras clave:** traducción; *Beowulf*; Seamus Heaney; extranjerización; domesticación

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf* is one of the first known compositions produced in the British Isles. Contained in the collection of original medieval Anglo-Saxon manuscripts *Cotton Vitellius A.xv*, its 3182 lines tell the story of the hero Beowulf, leader of the Geat warriors, from the moment he slays the monsters haunting the Danes—Grendel and Grendel’s mother—until he dies after freeing his people from a cruel dragon. Its date of composition remains uncertain, but many scholars date it between the 7th and 10th centuries (Liuzza, “On the Dating” 281; Frank 155). Even if it was originally transmitted orally by *scops*,<sup>1</sup> the poem was first written in Old English centuries after its oral composition (Liuzza, “On the Dating” 294). Thus, it reflects a period of transition in Anglo-Saxon culture and ideology, since at the end of the 6th century the Germanic peoples progressively abandoned paganism to embrace Christianity. *Beowulf* shows a tension between the two religions, a consequence of having a story of pagan origin told by a Christian narrator, the scribe transcribing it from the oral tradition centuries later.

Old English, although having evident influence on it, differs immensely from Contemporary Standard English regarding syntax, morphology, and phonological patterns. Accordingly, most present-day readers can only have access to the original text through translations. There have been several translations into Contemporary Standard English, essentially aimed at an Anglo-American<sup>2</sup> target readership. We must firstly highlight Grimur Jónsson Thorkelin’s valuable work, who performed the first complete transcription and translation

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<sup>1</sup> *Scop* is the Old English term referring to the minstrel who recited poems orally in the Anglo-Saxon period.

<sup>2</sup> This adjective refers to the English-speaking “great powers with the most influence in shaping the modern international system” (Narizny 342) that, because of their hegemonic economic and political position in the global order, are responsible for creating and maintaining the common characteristics of Western culture, i.e., nations such as the United States, Great Britain, Australia or New Zealand. The population of these countries also constitutes the main target readership for the translation of Heaney’s *Beowulf*.

of *Beowulf* at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> However, the most prolific period for Contemporary English translations of *Beowulf* is the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Chickering, “Beowulf” 161). There is still no agreement as to the most adequate way of translating the epic poem, and thus we find varying tendencies. Some, like Gummere’s (22-158), faithfully preserve Old English stylistic patterns that do not fit Contemporary English linguistic features. Others focus on “poetic paraphrases” (Chickering, “Beowulf” 162) to adapt the poem’s lyrical features to those of Contemporary English, such as Alexander’s (51-151), Liuzza’s (*Beowulf* 53-150) and Chickering’s (*Beowulf* 48-243), considered a canonical version for English-speaking students before Seamus Heaney’s translation (“The Text of *Beowulf*” 3-78) was published. The latter, indeed, represents another approach, focused on producing an ambivalent object: a translation and a work endowed with its author’s own style. Thus, this study focuses on Heaney’s translation, included in the first edition of the *Norton Critical Edition* (9-100). Two reasons prompted this choice. First, Heaney’s translation stands as one of the most important in the current academic panorama: it constitutes the epic poem’s version available to a large part of the English-speaking readership. Second, although he translates the composition into Contemporary Standard English, Heaney employs a considerable number of dialectal words from the Hiberno-English variety and, more specifically, from a subvariety of the latter: the Scullion-Speak, which Heaney defines as “a familiar local voice, one that had belonged to relatives of my father, people whom I had once described (punning on their surname) as ‘big-voiced scullions’” (Heaney, “Translator’s” xxxvi). The context of creation of Heaney’s translation responds to the nationalist unrest of post-colonial Ireland. Born in Northern Ireland in 1939, the translator experienced the last years of British colonization. Like for other Irish writers such as James Joyce, 1949 becomes a turning-point for Heaney; once the British oppression was over, he feels the “awareness of language-loss and cultural dispossession” (xxxiv). Indeed, his translation’s political intention was not overlooked by critics who, first, warned that this vindictive semantic load linked to the Irish historical past was not present in the poem and, therefore, distorted its primeval meaning; second, they indicated the biased interpretation that his translation implied for readers such as students, who might mistakenly think of Gaelic as part of Old English (Chickering, “Beowulf” 171-176; Howe 32-37; Gruber 67-84). Regardless of the criticism received, in his work as both a writer and a translator, Heaney aims to construct that “Irishness” denied by the oppressive British culture<sup>4</sup> during the colonial period.

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<sup>3</sup> He also used the manuscript as a source to explore the connections between Germanic languages.

<sup>4</sup> The term “culture” should be understood as, according to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2021), “the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time”, as well as, according to

To analyze the strategies adopted by Heaney in *Beowulf*'s translation process we have considered an English-speaking target readership, considering that the version of the epic poem included in the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, canonical in Anglo-American academia, is Heaney's translation (Heaney, "Beowulf, Translated" 9-100). Therefore, the introduction of Hiberno-English dialectal words in the translation process challenges the sociocultural and linguistic expectations of the target-language community because it underlines the foreignness of the source-text culture (Venuti, *The Translator's* 19), in this case the Anglo-Saxon culture.

Thus, the analysis of a translation such as Heaney's acquires relevance in the current state of Translation Studies given the area's growing interest in the critical observation of the representation of minority source-text languages in dominant target-text languages, as shown by Venuti (*The Translator's*; "Foundational"), Aixelá (52-79), Baker, M. (xv-xvii) or Bastin (5-8). According to Venuti (*The Translator's* 21), every translation process involves an act of "ethnocentric violence" on the foreign source text. The aim of such an act is the "reconstitution of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations" (18) inherent in the target-language culture. The systematic elimination of the "linguistic and cultural differences" (Venuti, "Foundational" 20) of the foreign text results in a "domesticated" translation (Venuti, *The Translator's* 5) or, in other words, a translation adapted to the sociocultural and linguistic features of a target-language culture. The latter can thus perceive the translated text as readable, fluent and transparent (1, 16). Heaney translates *Beowulf* from Old English into Contemporary Standard English, which implies an inevitably significant domesticating effect on the target text given the differences between the source-language culture, that of the Anglo-Saxon society (5th to 11th centuries, approximately), and the target-language culture, that of today's Anglo-American societies. However, the hypothesis underlying this research is that the inclusion of Hiberno-English terms in the translation of the epic poem evidences a double purpose in Heaney's task as a translator: on the one hand, to highlight the foreignness of the original source text through the use of lexical items that the target-language culture finds alien; on the other hand, to challenge Standard English domination as a form of protest against Britain's cultural and linguistic colonizing role over Ireland.

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Bourke (476), a "shorthand for social and environmental interactions" including "both interpersonal relations as well as people's engagement with all aspects of their surroundings".

Considering this, the aim of this study is to perform a comparative analysis between Heaney's translation of *Beowulf* and the original *Beowulf* manuscript provided by the *Electronic Beowulf 4.0* (Kiernan). Applying the classifications offered by Bastin (5-8) and Aixelá (52-79), we will determine the translation strategies employed by Heaney in order to 1) obtain a sufficient level of domestication to achieve a nearly complete readability of the poem, 2) use Hibernicisms to avoid subordinating the features of the source-language culture present in the foreign text to the socio-cultural and linguistic expectations of the target-language culture, and 3) insert Hibernicisms as a tool to contribute to his personal political agenda, that is, providing Ireland with an identity of its own.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The theoretical basis for Heaney's translation analysis is constituted, first, by the concept of Culture-Specific Item (CSI) proposed by Aixelá (55-58). CSIs are "the result of a conflict arising from any linguistically represented reference in a source text which, when transferred to a target language, poses a translation problem due to the nonexistence or to the different value (whether determined by ideology, usage, frequency, etc.) of the given item in the target language culture" (Aixelá 57). Aixelá illustrates the nature of CSIs with an example:

In Bible translation, there is the now classic argument over how to translate the image of the 'lamb' into languages in whose cultures this animal is unknown or, if known, does not have connotations of innocence, helplessness, and so on. Thus, the translation of 'lamb' from Hebrew into the language of Eskimos will acquire, in principle, the status of a CSI and will become a translation problem (57-58).

Accordingly, the lexical items considered in the present analysis are CSIs: there is an "intercultural gap" (58) between the meaning that the Old English terms evoked in the Anglo-Saxon source-language culture and the connotations that Heaney's translations acquire. Thus, the translator solves the cultural problems arising in the translation process by considering "the translation norms (genre conventions, intertextuality, credibility, interference, etc.) expected by their initiators, critics and/or readers" (58). Although Heaney is faithful to the Anglo-American readership's sociocultural "expectations" by translating certain CSIs with Standard English terms, comprehensible from the perspective of the target-language culture, many other CSIs are translated using Hiberno-English dialectal words. Belonging to a minority English language variety, the translation of these lexical items gives rise to a new "intercultural gap" (58): the translation's readability is reduced because the target-language culture is confronted with words that refer to

sociocultural aspects of Northern Ireland, foreign to Anglo-American culture. Although they are likely to know the given term because it belongs to a dialect within the English language itself, the target-language readership is not used to employing it in everyday discourse.

At this point we need to comment on the contributions of Venuti (*The Translator's*; "Foundational"). According to him, the study of translation should be carried out considering the "relative autonomy of translation", that is, those "factors that distinguish it from the source text and from texts initially written in the translating language" (Venuti, "Foundational" 4). Translation research should focus on the techniques and strategies adopted by translators both to overcome and to voluntarily set up obstacles "to cross-cultural understanding by working over the source text in the receiving culture" (5). In this case, Heaney's translation into Standard English of certain *Beowulf's* CSIs solves the problems of "intercultural gap" (Aixelá 57) between the source and target text, omitting the "linguistic and cultural differences" (Venuti, *The Translator's* 34) between the two by adapting the features of the source-text culture to those of the target-text culture. However, the translation of other CSIs into Hibernicisms creates, in fact, an obstacle to the target-language culture's fluent comprehension of the translated text.

These two forms of translation produce target texts of two different natures, "domesticated" (6) or "foreignized" (24). Venuti defines *domestication* as a form of translation in which the obtained target text holds an "effect of fluent discourse", "easy readability" and an "illusion of transparency" (1) that makes the translation seem like an original text. The fondness for domestication dominates the English-language translation field (2), since the most valued aspects in a translated text are the following:

A fluent translation is written in English that is current ("modern") instead of archaic, that is widely used instead of specialized ("jargonisation"), and that is standard instead of colloquial ("slangy"). Foreign words ("pidgin") are avoided, as are Britishisms in American translations and Americanisms in British translations (4).

However, for this reason, the scholar considers translation as a process of "ethnocentric violence" (21): the pursuit of this "illusion of transparency" (1) through the translator's domesticating task biases the meaning of the CSIs present in the original text by hiding them behind terms semantically faithful to the target-language sociocultural system (20). Therefore, Venuti proposes a second approach to translation, that of foreignizing translation. This approach "signifies the differences of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language" (21). Thus, foreignization becomes a tool to resist the Anglo-American sphere's current cultural and linguistic

domination, manifested in terms of “ethnocentrism and racism, cultural narcissism and imperialism, (...) the interests of democratic geopolitical relations” (21). One way of creating a foreignizing effect in translation is the use of marginal languages or dialects, as in Heaney’s case. This challenges the expectations of the target-language readership because it moves away from hegemonic cultural values to make visible “the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text” (23).

To evidence Heaney’s domesticating/foreignizing task in the translation process of *Beowulf*, we follow the translation strategies classifications proposed by Bastin (5-8) and Aixelá (52-79), since the complementation of both allows for a more complete analysis of each CSI under consideration. Bastin (7) considers seven strategies: “transcription of the original”, “omission”, “expansion”, “exoticism”, “updating”, “situational equivalence” and “creation”. However, bearing in mind those employed by Heaney, we consider four of them: “transcription of the original”, “exoticism”, “updating” and “creation”. On the other hand, Aixelá (61-64) considers five strategies of “conservation of the original reference” (61)—“repetition”, “orthographic adaptation”, “linguistic (non-cultural) translation”, “extratextual” and “intratextual gloss”—and nine strategies of “substitution of the original reference” (61)—“synonymy”, “limited” and “absolute universalization”, “naturalization”, “deletion”, “autonomous creation”, “compensation”, “dislocation” and “attenuation”. Considering those employed by Heaney, we only consider the strategies of “repetition”, “orthographic adaptation” and “extratextual gloss”—of conservation—and of “absolute” and “limited universalization”, “autonomous creation” and “compensation”—of substitution.<sup>5</sup>

Following these theoretical concepts, the adopted methodology consists of 1) the presentation of a table containing the data obtained on the strategies used to translate the CSIs and the domesticating or foreignizing effect they produce on the target text; 2) the inclusion of explanatory comments on the data obtained regarding each CSI; and 3) a description of the conclusions obtained.

Finally, we must mention that the corpus of material for analysis is composed of twelve CSIs, that is, twelve lexical items that are presented in pairs, the original Old English version and Heaney’s translation. The twelve terms or expressions have been chosen because of implying important differences regarding the cultural material they represent in the source-language and target-language cultures.

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<sup>5</sup> The functioning of each of the selected strategies will be explained in the analysis section since it can be easily illustrated through the CSIs under consideration.

## 2. SEAMUS HEANEY: *BEOWULF* AS AN EPIPHANY

Translators, as “human and social actors” (Kelly et al. 117), are conditioned by their specific context, which will question the system of “ethics, power and identity” (117) of the original *Beowulf* trying to adapt it to the social customs of their own times through the translation process. One of the most illustrative examples showing this issue is Seamus Heaney’s translation of the Anglo-Saxon composition. Apart from the evident contribution to a better comprehension of the Anglo-Saxon values, ideology and artistic forms which his translation into Contemporary Standard English implies, Heaney is interested in *Beowulf* for accomplishing a secondary purpose. According to O’Brien (4-5), Seamus Heaney uses literature for exploring the Irish identity, as it can be noticed in his poetic production. To understand this, we need to highlight that this author, born in Northern Ireland in 1939, experiences the last years of the British colonization of his country. Once the British oppression was over in 1949, Heaney felt the urge to help in the construction of that lost “Irishness”, denied under the dominance of the imposed English culture during the colonial period. In that sense, Heaney employs literature and language as tools for finding the true Irish identity given that Ireland is experiencing a state of doubt: it cannot claim the English culture as its own, but neither resort to an individual Irish one because, after so much time as a colony, a totally unique culture had been completely forgotten “as regards principles, values and ethical positions” (2). Therefore, Heaney’s interpretation of *Beowulf* constitutes a “postcolonial/anti-colonial response to British imperialist definitions of the Irish identity” (Cañadas para. 16). Heaney devotes his literary production to contribute to the creation of a new ideology for an Irish “social unit” (Campbell 355) and to put into value the worthy place of Ireland within a global historical progress in such a way that “parallels that of the Irish psyche over the past fifty years” (O’Brien 4). Thus, Heaney’s task as a writer and a translator is fully influenced by the feeling of uncertainty which surrounded the conflict of Ireland’s cultural emptiness. As he writes in *Wintering Out*, there is a moment for his nation to be “lost / [u]nhappy”, but after all “at home” (Heaney cited in O’Brien 3 lines 43-44). Consequently, his *Beowulf*’s translation was also used with the further purpose of recovering that lost “Irishness”. Heaney conceptualizes literature and translation as a fight for a reformulation of the conceptual dichotomy created by the English colonizer. Such a dichotomy describes Ireland as the “different” and “inferior” culture. His role as writer and translator is, thus, “at the service as a cultural ambassador for the cause of the Irish” (Cañadas para. 25). Nonetheless, Heaney has yet to confront the vacuum of cultural origins that the English colonization had left behind in Northern Ireland. Consequently, the author finds a plausible solution in the memory of his personal childhood experiences, of his early



years living at the Ulster family farm. Therefore, he resorts to “the working world of his forefathers” (para. 8) as a primary source for constructing the cultural roots of Ireland: the memories of the farming tasks fulfilled by his father, especially those having to do directly with the land, such as seeding or harvesting, become for Heaney features of the real character of Ireland. According to Cañadas (para. 13), Heaney’s conception of a true “Irishness” lies on a combination of the “self-reliant nature of the traditional rural community” where he grew up, and the “tradition of hard work” which that natural space has implied for Ireland as a basic economic source all along history.<sup>6</sup> For the author, the Irish identity shares an intense connection with nature—especially with the land and other elements from the Irish landscape—and with a value system derived from the human effort to tame that nature, as shown in other poetic works such as *Digging* or *North*.

Indeed, Heaney’s idea of Irish culture as based in a symbiotic relationship between the Irish people and nature is similar to the Germanic values and ideology: aspects like the relevance of the sea in funeral rites—as we notice in Scyld Scefing’s funeral—the primary source that peasantry and agriculture meant for social stability or the pre-Christian worship to pagan gods related to natural elements such as *Freya* (Johnston 151) make Anglo-Saxon and Irish cultures to be conceived as equivalent by the author. Moreover, Heaney is aware of the similarities between *Beowulf*’s language, Old English, and his own rural Ulster dialect, the Scullion-Speak: the phonological and morphological resemblances lead him to see *Beowulf* as an ancestor for the reduced and localized Irish Scullion dialect. Thus, several lexical items in his translation are interpreted via these dialectal words instead of their corresponding equivalent term in Standard English. Again, even the language in which *Beowulf* is written becomes useful for Heaney, not only as a means for rebelling against the English power, but also because the “importance of ancestry” is “an identifier of one’s belonging to a particular nation” (Harmon 13), as a reaffirmation of the Irish self. Then, *Beowulf* stands for Heaney as the tool to forge solid cultural origins for Northern Ireland.

However, the author does not only employ the translation task for demolishing the power relationships underlying both the English psyche as constituting the “self”, “center” or “civilized” dominating cultural power and the Irish psyche as being the “other”, “peripheral” or “uncivilized” dominated cultural power. Translation is also useful for denouncing the extremely hostile environment originated by the religious conflict between Catholics and

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<sup>6</sup> During colonisation, Ireland’s primary source of nourishment was essentially agricultural products, such as the potato (Jackson, “Famine and Land” 544-561).

Protestants in the Ulster during the 20th century.<sup>7</sup> Heaney conceives both the tasks of translation and literary writing as a “connection between past and present” (Veldeman 133) which shows the illogical convictions lying in human mind: as shown in *Funeral Rites*, Heaney denounces the absurdity that “The Troubles” implied for Northern Ireland. He achieves this through an analogy with the violent context shown by the Norse *Njal’s saga*, namely, the violence exerted by the Norsemen of the 13th century Scandinavian society, who killed each other despite belonging to the same family or tribe. Like those Norse “neighbours” (134), the Ulster inhabitants fight against each other even though they all share the same roots, culture, and homeland. The use of *Njal’s saga* proves that *Beowulf* does not constitute the only literary work coming from an ancient Northern culture which inspired Heaney. Indeed, it is *Beowulf*, a composition which represents the moment of transition between two different religions—paganism and Christianity—that the Anglo-Saxon society experienced since the 7th century, where Heaney can realize the foolishness of fighting for something as spiritual as religion. For him, trying to impose faith dogma through violence is nonsense, and *Beowulf* is an example of a harmonious cohabitation of opposed ideologies.

Heaney notices that *Beowulf* was composed within a particular sociocultural system which is similar to his own one regarding traditions, customs and language. Therefore, it is easy for him to use “[n]ational discourse as a generator of national identity” (Harmon, 17) and to project in the epic poem the cultural features of the Ulster’s society: ideology, ethical system, customs, etc. However, as he himself stated, translating *Beowulf* was like “taking a sledgehammer to a quarry face” (Heaney cited in Gussow para. 5). The difficulty which implied the long distance in time between the Anglo-Saxon and contemporary civilizations made Heaney consider translating the epic poem to Standard English as an impossible task if the goal was to preserve a sense close to the source-text culture. As a result, he eventually abandoned his project of translating *Beowulf* (Gussow para. 7). Nonetheless, when trying to tackle the epic poem years later, he experienced what we could consider as an epiphany: Heaney discovered that the Old English employed in *Beowulf* included a lexical item which was also present in the lexicon of his family’s Irish dialect, the Scullion-Speak, distinctive of the rural environment where he had grown up. It was the verb *thole*, which means *suffering* (McGuire 84). Consequently, Heaney established “a bridge between cultures and centuries”

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<sup>7</sup> Known as “The Troubles”, the military conflict taking place in Northern Ireland confronted Unionists (those who wanted to keep being part of England and, usually, protestants) and Republicans (those who wanted Northern Ireland to be independent from the English control) (Jackson, “Irish History” 3-21).

(Gussow para. 8). Firstly, *Beowulf*, a literary work apparently foreign to his sociocultural system, becomes a closer element which he feels identified with and emotionally linked to; Heaney, thus, conceives *Beowulf* as another personal poetic means of expressing emotions. Secondly, and most importantly, *Beowulf* provided a solid background for the building of a new Irish identity as it confirmed the existence of a long-lasting Irishness present in the past, now lost because of the English oppression. The past of Heaney's Ireland is manifested in his *Beowulf*'s particular interpretation through a variety of lexicon which, according to him, has a stronger power than Standard English to get a better approach to the “[v]ery strong (and) forceful things” (Gussow para. 12) that the Anglo-Saxon epic poem depicts. In the following section we will analyze the strategies that Heaney applies to translate the CSIs present in the source text, inherent to the Germanic ethos, through CSIs inherent to Heaney's Irish culture. Likewise, we will also pay attention to those source-text CSIs that are translated through lexical items in Standard English and are thus more “transparent” and “fluent” (Venuti, *The Translator's* 1) for the target-language culture or, in other words, Anglo-American culture.

### 3. ANALYSIS OF CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS (CSIs) OF *BEOWULF*

Table 1. Data obtained from the analysis of Heaney's translation of the source-text CSIs: translation into Standard English/Hiberno-English, translation strategies employed, foreignizing/domesticating effect of translation.

Old English CSI	Heaney's translation of the CSI into Standard English	Heaney's translation of the CSI into Hiberno-English	CSI's meaning in Standard English (Bosworth)	Translation strategy (Bastin 5-8; Aixelá 52-79)	Overall effect on the translation
<i>cyning</i>	<i>king</i>		“ruler”	Updating Absolute universalization	Domestication
<i>swa sceal geong guma gode gewyrcean</i>	<i>the young prince must be prudent like that</i>		“so should a young man achieve excellence”	Updating Absolute universalization	Domestication
<i>beaggyfan</i>	<i>ring-giver</i>		“ring-giver”	Transcription of the original Repetition, orthographic adaptation	Foreignization
<i>sincgifan</i>	<i>treasure-giver</i>		“treasure-giver”	Transcription of the original Repetition, orthographic adaptation	Foreignization

<i>Hwaet</i>		<i>So</i>	“Why!”, “What!”	Exoticism Limited universalization	Foreignization
<i>ymbesittendra</i>		<i>clan</i>	“kinsman”	Exoticism Limited universalization	Foreignization
<i>leoda</i>		<i>sept</i>	“people”, “tribe”	Exoticism Limited universalization, extratextual gloss	Foreignization
<i>ðyle</i>		<i>brehon</i>	“spokesman”	Exoticism, creation Compensation (deletion+ autonomous creation), extratextual gloss	Foreignization
<i>giddum</i>		<i>keens</i>	“dirge”, “lament”	Exoticism Limited universalization	Foreignization
<i>grimlic</i>		<i>scaresomely</i>	“cruel”, “severe”	Exoticism Limited universalization, extratextual gloss	Foreignization
<i>burum</i>		<i>bothies</i>	“private room”, “chamber”	Exoticism, creation Compensation (deletion+ autonomous creation), extratextual gloss	Foreignization
<i>fengelad</i>		<i>kesh</i>	“bridge”	Exoticism Limited universalization, extratextual gloss	Foreignization

### 3.1. CSI 1: “cyning”; CSI 2: “swa sceal geong guma gode gewyrcean”

The Anglo-Saxon civilization was based on an idealization of warfare as the main source for social recognition. A “heroic ideal” underlies the Anglo-Saxon culture (Baker, P. xiii): prototypical ideal manhood was represented through the figure of the warrior, and most precisely through the *cyning*. This Old English term comprehends the summit of the Germanic social pyramid, the warrior-like leader of the tribe (John 67). Indeed, Beowulf becomes the personification of this Germanic syncretic *king/hero* ideal, incarnating the main features of the Anglo-Saxon warrior culture reflected in epic poetry:

Beowulf himself is of heroic stature. His strength and valor made manifest in every exploit, his wisdom, his regard for the etiquette of an aristocratic society, his long victorious reign, the assurance of his speeches and the nobility of his intentions, all these are the proper ingredients of heroism (Stanley 30).

Indeed, it is Beowulf who, after being mortally wounded by the dragon, lists those Anglo-Saxon leader's essential features by describing himself as the ruler of the Geats during "fifty winters" (Heaney, "The Text of *Beowulf*" 56 line 2209): Beowulf is defined as the ideal leader because of his fearlessness—as "any neighboring clan would dare / face" (68 lines 2734-35) him—because of his righteous way of thinking—as he "never fomented quarrels" (68 lines 2738)—and because of his trustworthiness—as he "never / swore a lie" (68 lines 2738-39). Around the social summit occupied by the *cyning* spread the rest of the Anglo-Saxon social groups. That of warriors constituted the most relevant group in the Germanic social order. Their ideology conceived war as the main method to obtain fame and success, but it is also relevant to mention that the thane corps fulfilled the task of protecting the *cyning* (John 71). Wiglaf sums up this idea in a few words: "[a] warrior will sooner / die than live a life of shame" (Heaney, "The Text of *Beowulf*" 72 lines 2890-91).

Therefore, the translation of CSI 1<sup>8</sup> involves, following Bastin (7), an updating strategy because Heaney eliminates the references to the Anglo-Saxon *cyning*'s inherent features mentioned above. He replaces the term with a "modern equivalent" (Bastin 7) that is comprehensible to the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century Anglo-American target-language culture. Likewise, according to Aixelá (52), this strategy consists of absolute universalization since the translator replaces "any foreign connotations" of the source term by another term closer to the target readership's sociocultural expectations. However, the CSI *king* does not include the same connotations enclosed in the term *cyning*. The contemporary target-language culture is heavily influenced by ideological notions built in the Western Medieval Ages when concepts such as *kingship* and *monarchy* were developed as they are understood nowadays. The Anglo-Saxon conception of the *cyning* as a warrior-like leader, generous and kind to his thanes, turns in the medieval period into new conventions defining the socially and culturally considered as an "ideal" leader: the idea of *king* was born, based on Baldassare Castiglione's depiction of a new ideal manhood, represented in the figure of the *courtier*.

The same strategy operates in CSI 2, which describes some behavioral traits of the ideal *cyning*. Following Bastin (7), CSI 2 is an instance of updating, and following Aixelá (52), of absolute universalization. This CSI illustrates how Heaney projects the conventions of the courtly king in the CSI *cyning*, distorting the original sense of the term, as shown in his translation of line 20: "the young *prince* must be *prudent*<sup>9</sup> like that" (Heaney, "The Text of *Beowulf*" 3). The adaptation of the elements of the source-language culture present in

<sup>8</sup> "Ðæt wæs god cyning" (Kiernan line 11); "That was one good king" (Heaney, "The Text of *Beowulf*" 3 line 11).

<sup>9</sup> Italics are mine.

*cyning* to the political conception valid in the target-language culture is noticeable because line 20, “swa sceal geong guma gode gewyrcean”, means “so should a young *man*<sup>10</sup> achieve excellence” (Kiernan line 20). Apart from the distortion of the Germanic culture latent in the source text by using the term *prince*—nobility title which did not even exist during the Anglo-Saxon period—Heaney’s adding of the feature *prudent* to the figure of the *cyning* indicates how, since the Late Middle Ages, fierceness in warfare becomes less relevant in kings. The early Renaissance type of leader is favored instead, a well-rounded man who knows how to behave in society apart from using his arms: “it is a new social model of behavior”, based on “caution, decorum, moderation, grace, self-control” (Ricci 101). Consequently, in the case of CSI 2, Heaney also applies a strategy of situational equivalence (Bastin 7): projecting the new features that the updating strategy brings to CSI 1, the translator spreads the “domesticated” interpretation of *cyning* to other lines where his figure is mentioned, such as line 20; thus, Heaney extends to the whole target text a context that is “more familiar” (2) from the target-language culture’s perspective. In short, we observe that the strategies employed in CSI 1 and CSI 2 grant the target text a “domesticating” effect because they subordinate the source-language culture’s conception of *tribal chief* to the conception of *monarch* shaped by the dominant English-speaking target ideological system.

### 3.2. CSI 3: “beaggyfan”; CSI 4: “sincgifan”

The same strategies operate in CSI 3<sup>11</sup> and 4<sup>12</sup>: following Bastin (7), a strategy of transcription of the original; following Aixelá (61), a strategy of repetition. The translations of both source-text CSIs as “ring-giver” and “treasure-giver” maintain the original shape of the kenning, a typical figure of speech in Anglo-Saxon poetry. It consists of a circumlocutory and metaphorical nominal phrase or compound word, used to poetically name specific realities (Fulk xix-xx). Fulk (xix) offers a prototypical example of kenning in *Beowulf*, “whale-road” (Heaney, “The Text of *Beowulf*” 3 line 10). The term, from the Old English “hronrade” (Kiernan line 10), refers to the sea. Through this instance, we observe the kenning’s typical compound shape, built from the union of two nouns in a single word: “hron” means “whale”; “rade” means “road” (Bosworth).

Although this rhetorical figure is no longer frequently used in contemporary Anglo-American literary production, Heaney “use(s) all coinages for the lord of the nation,

<sup>10</sup> Italics are mine.

<sup>11</sup> “ðeah hie hira beaggyfan banan folgedon” (Kiernan line 1101); “Their own ring-giver after all” (Heaney, “The Text of *Beowulf*” 29 line 1101).

<sup>12</sup> “on hyra sincgifan sare geendod” (Kiernan line 2312); “it was their treasure-giver who would come to grief” (Heaney, “The Text of *Beowulf*” 59 line 2311).

variously referred to as ‘ring-giver’, ‘treasure-giver’” (Heaney, “The Text of *Beowulf*” xxix). Thus, he employs the strategies mentioned above because he projects a “word-for-word reproduction” (Bastin 7) of the original CSI in the target text, keeping “as much as (he) can of the original reference” (Aixelá 61). However, an orthographic adaptation strategy (61) is also involved since the source text’s CSI is expressed in a different alphabet than that of the target readership.

These strategies provoke a foreignizing effect in the target text. The almost identical projection of a rhetorical device that no longer belongs to the corpus of stylistic figures of the target-language culture’s literature leads the reader to notice its strangeness. Thus, Heaney partially preserves the identity of the source-text culture by including a Germanic poetic feature that “challenges” the target-language literary conventions.

### 3.3. CSI 5: “Hwaet”

*Hwaet*, the first term opening the poem, is a call of attention for the listeners: in Germanic culture, literary works were not read, but recited in front of an audience (Stanley 23). Although the Anglo-Saxon literal meaning of the interjection is *what*, as McMillan (para. 14) states, early attempts of translation—influenced by the *King James Bible*’s lexicon translated into Modern English in 1611—adapt it to “[l]o”, such as Gummere (22). Other more modern versions focus on its illocutionary force: “[a]ttend!”, as shown in Alexander (51), or even an affirmative “[y]es!”, as shown in Rebsamen (2). Nevertheless, Heaney chooses “So.” (Heaney “The Text of *Beowulf*” 3 line 1) as the most accurate version. This lexical item adds to *Beowulf* a conversational and more familiar style which helps Heaney to bring the poem closer to his personal experience. His lexical choice is produced because “in Hiberno-English Scullion-Speak, the particle ‘so’ came naturally to the rescue” (Heaney, “Translator’s” xxxvi) given its ambivalent function, both for removing any trace from a previous discourse and as a colloquial exclamation usual in every “Scullion kitchen” (xxxvii).

Consequently, Heaney applies a strategy of exoticism to the translation of CSI 5. He replaces a term whose use in the source-language culture is restricted to only one function—calling the audience’s attention—and to one communicative situation—the recitation of the poem—with a Hibernicism that also fulfills a very specific ambivalent function, as mentioned before. Thus, Heaney employs a lexical item that is “equivalent” (Bastin 7) to the source-language CSI.

However, we can also consider the application of the limited universalization strategy (Aixelá 63): Heaney replaces the source-text CSI by a Scullion-Speak dialectal word that fulfills the same communicative functions as the first one. The Irish term, although “closer” to the target readership, is “less specific” (63), being a term belonging to a minority English-

language variety and, thus, more difficult to understand by a broad Anglo-American readership.

The strategies applied to CSI 5 create a foreignizing effect in the target text from line 1. The Scullion-Speak interjection emphasizes the source text's foreignness through the actual *foreignness* that the Irish dialectal word has in the target language.

### 3.4. CSI 6: “ymbesittendra”; CSI 7: “leoda”; CSI 8: “ðyle”

According to McGuire (80), Heaney focuses largely on words belonging to the semantic field of the particular Germanic social order and the relations among the different layers of the hierarchy. We find the Old English source-text term “ymbesittendra” (Kiernan line 2735) being translated into the Irish term “clan” (Heaney, “The Text of Beowulf” 68 line 2734). Accordingly, Heaney gets closer to the source-text meaning of “ymbesittendra”: as the Old English item refers to “one living on the borders of another’s country, a neighbor” (Bosworth), the Irish word reflects how Beowulf conceptualizes his own tribe as different from the neighboring ones. In fact, the meaning of the Contemporary Standard English corresponding term *kinsman* implies a blood connection between Beowulf’s tribe and the neighboring tribe, an aspect that does not exist in the source-text meaning.

Therefore, from Bastin’s perspective (7), the strategy involved in the translation of CSI 6<sup>13</sup> is exoticism: the inclusion of the Hibernicism “clan” suggests to the target-language readership the unusual and alien character of the source text. Likewise, from Aixelá’s perspective (63), the strategy applied is limited universalization: although the translation of CSI 6 is close to the exact meaning of the source-text CSI, it is also close to the socio-cultural expectations of the target-language culture despite being “less specific” (Aixelá 63), since “clan” belongs to a minority English-language variety.

The same strategies are applied to CSI 7<sup>14</sup>, adding an extratextual gloss strategy through a footnote explaining the meaning of the Hibernicism “sept”. Although the Old English “leoda” (Kiernan line 1675) means *people* or *tribe* in Standard English, Heaney translates it through the Irish word “sept” (Heaney, “The Text of Beowulf” 44 line 1674). In early Irish society, “[e]ach clan was composed of a number of septs” (Ginnell 87), in the sense of “family branch” (McGuire 80). Heaney employs such interpretation of the Old English term regarding “the historical social structure in Ireland, so as to differentiate it from” other “centralized clan systems”, such as the one of Scotland (Clans of Ireland Company para. 3).

<sup>13</sup> “ymbesittendra ænig ðara” (Kiernan line 2735), “of any neighbouring clan would dare” (Heaney, “The Text of Beowulf” 68 line 2734).

<sup>14</sup> “þegna gehwylc þinra leoda” (Kiernan line 1675); “for a single thane of your sept or nation” (Heaney, “The Text of Beowulf” 44 line 1674).



Closely related with this last lexical item, we see in line 1458 that the title of “ðyle”, the *spokesman*—as translated in Standard English—within the group of soldiers aiding the *cyning* (McGuire 80), is translated through the Hibernicism “brehon” (Heaney, “The Text of *Beowulf*” 39), which refers to the first kind of lawyers known in Ireland’s Iron Age society. Thanks to the “Brehon law”, the actual *sept* mentioned above could be established in Ireland (Ginnell 78).

Resultantly, according to Bastin, two strategies operate in CSI 8.<sup>15</sup> First, exoticism: as in CSI 6 and 7, the adaptation of the source-text item to a Hibernicism highlights the foreignness of the source-text language/culture from the target-language readership’s perspective. However, also operating to some degree in the translation of this CSI is a creation strategy: by attributing the connotations of “brehon” to the source-text CSI, Heaney replaces the overall meaning of the latter by preserving only “the essential message/ideas/functions” (7). In other words, the translation only maintains the public character of the social figure referred to in the CSI source-text. This is then overshadowed by the more specific features of the target-text CSI, namely, of that type of Irish primitive lawyers.

From Aixelá’s perspective, a compensation strategy—deletion and autonomous creation—operates in the translation of CSI 8. The strategy consists of two steps: first, Heaney deletes most of the connotations of the source-text CSI and then generates new meanings in the target text through an autonomous creation. In other words, just as can be observed from Bastin’s view, Heaney omits the defining features of the Anglo-Saxon “ðyle”—*spokesman*—to endow it with those of the Irish lawyer during the Iron Age.

In short, the discussed strategies confer a foreignizing effect on the target text. As in CSI 6 and 7, the inclusion of lexical items belonging to a minority English-language variety “challenges” the sociocultural and linguistic expectations that bias the Anglo-American reader confronting the translation as a transparent and fluent text. Contrarily, the use of dialectal words achieves a double objective: to vindicate the relevance of the source-text language and culture, but also to provide Irish culture with its own meanings, independent of English domination.

### 3.5. CSI 9: “giddum”

From Bastin’s perspective, Heaney employs a strategy of exoticism in the translation of CSI 9<sup>16</sup>. The Old English term “giddum”, meaning “dirge” or “lament” in Standard English

<sup>15</sup> “þæt him on ðearfe lah ðyle Hroðgares” (Kiernan line 1458), “the brehon hilted him a hilted weapon” (Heaney, “The Text of *Beowulf*” line 1457).

<sup>16</sup> “geomrode giddum. Guðrinc astah” (Kiernan line 1116), “The woman wailed / and sang keens” (Heaney, “The Text of *Beowulf*” 30 lines 1117-8).

(Bosworth, 2014), is translated to the Hibernicism “keens” (Heaney, “The Text of *Beowulf*” 30 lines 1118). In Gaelic and Scottish culture, *keening* is a funeral rite where women usually intone a “vocalized cry” (Laughlin 1)—songs known as *keens*—following a fixed structure to mention relevant aspects about the deceased (e.g. genealogy, a praise, etc.). The CSI target-text thus brings an exotic character to the translation, considering that the Anglo-American target culture—influenced by a mainly Christian tradition—finds alien and foreign a funeral rite of pagan tradition such as the Irish keening.

Accordingly, it is necessary to mention that, from Aixelá’s perspective, this strategy consists of limited universalization. The source-text CSI, representing an Anglo-Saxon custom difficult to understand for the target-language culture, is “too obscure” (Aixelá 63). Thus, the choice of “keens” as a translation preserves the melancholic component of the source-text CSI but, at the same time, brings it closer to the target reader’s cultural system: despite belonging to the culture of a Northern Irish minority social group, the ritual of keening is more intelligible to the target-language culture, especially to the English one.

These strategies bring a foreignizing effect to the translation. The adaptation of the Germanic burial ritual described by the source-text CSI to another tradition with pagan roots as represented by the target-text CSI makes the target readership realize that the socio-cultural system in which *Beowulf* was composed is essentially different from that of the Anglo-American community today. Furthermore, Heaney emphasizes the Irish identity through the use of Hibernicisms: this strategy introduces into the target text “varying cultural assumptions and interpretive choices” (Venuti, *The Translator’s* 18) provoking a certain degree of unintelligibility for the dominant target language.

### 3.6. CSI 10: “grimlic”

The same strategies involved in CSI 9 are applied to the translation of CSI 10<sup>17</sup>, so we will not provide an extensive commentary. Heaney does not only project Irish social customs in those presented in *Beowulf* through Anglo-Saxon celebrations and rites, but also the social customs reflected in language as a means of self-expression within a particular society and context. Therefore, while for the Germanic civilization the most relevant feature of a fire-dragon is that it is “grimlic” (Kiernan line 3043)—meaning “cruel” or “severe” (Bosworth)—Heaney translates it as “scaresomely” (Heaney, “The Text of *Beowulf*” 75 line 3041), a Hibernicism meaning “frightening” (Dolan 199) in Standard English. From Bastin’s perspective, the use of exoticism is evident considering not only that Heaney translates the

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<sup>17</sup> “grimlic gryregist gledum beswæled” (Kiernan line 3043), “was scaresomely red, scorched all colors” (Heaney, “The Text of *Beowulf*” 75 line 3041).

source-text CSI through a Hibernicism, but also that he must rely on an extratextual gloss strategy through a footnote to explain the meaning of the dialectal term in Standard English.

### 3.7. CSI 11: “burum”

As in the case of CSI 10, the translation of CSI 11<sup>18</sup> involves an extratextual gloss strategy. The original Old English word “burum” (Kiernan line 140), meaning “private room” or “chamber”, is translated in Hiberno-English as “bothies”. According to the footnote, the Irish term is derived from *bothóg*, meaning a “hut” or a “shanty” which is usually hosted by unmarried farmers (Heaney, “The Text of Beowulf” 6 line 140). Therefore, we can find other strategies. Considering Bastin’s classification (7), apart from the evident exoticism strategy adopted—given the Hibernicism’s foreign nature for the target-language culture—Heaney applies to a certain degree a creation strategy. Translation via Irish dialectal words implies that, despite maintaining “only the essential message/ideas/functions of the original” (7)—in this case the room’s private character that the term refers to—he introduces new features regarding the source-text CSI: “burum” refers to a room, “bothies” to an entire dwelling. Thus, Heaney “creates” a new set of meanings for the lexical item in the target text.

Similarly, from Aixelá’s perspective (64), a compensation strategy operates in the translation of this CSI. First, Heaney performs a partial deletion of the connotations that integrate the global meaning of “burum” in the source-language culture, preserving only its central feature (the room’s privacy). Next, he performs an autonomous creation of the connotations making up the Hibernicism’s meaning.

Therefore, the translator obtains a foreignizing effect in the target text aiming to make the target readership reflect on “cultural and linguistic differences” (Venuti, *The Translator’s* 21) that cannot be hidden behind the dominant language just to achieve a more readable and fluent translation. But, in addition, it prompts the reader to reflect on the relevant role of Irishness in the Anglo-American context: the use of Hibernicisms fills with crucial aspects of the Irish language and culture a “nonexistent cultural reference in the source text” (Aixelá 64).

### 3.8. CSI 12: “fengelad”

Finally, the semantic field concerning the landscape’s geographical features is also a blank space for Heaney to leave his “personal imprint” (Creedon 72). The meaning of the Old English noun “fengelad” (Kiernan line 1361) in Standard English is “headland” (McGuire 80). However, Heaney translates it with the synonym Irish lexical item “kesh” (Heaney, “The Text of Beowulf” 37 line 1359). Aware of the target-language culture’s uncertainty towards

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<sup>18</sup> “bed æfter burum, ða him gebeacnod wæs” (Kiernan line 140), “to bed in the bothies, for who could be blind” (Heaney, “The Text of Beowulf” 6 line 140).

this term, he includes a footnote defining the item as “[a] causeway or bridge across a bog” (37). This clearly implies the use of an extratextual gloss strategy (Aixelá 62), but it also evidences the use of exoticism (Bastin 7): the incorporation of the Hibernicism draws attention to the reality it designates for the target-language culture to perceive it as an element alien to its sociocultural and linguistic expectations. Similarly, from Aixelá’s perspective (63), we can consider the application of a limited universalization strategy: the choice of an Irish word as a translation of the source-text’s CSI approaches, firstly, the target-language culture—although it is a dialectal word of the Hiberno-English minority variety, it belongs to the English language common stock—but, secondly, it also approaches the source-language culture because it preserves the essential connotation shaping its meaning, that is, the basic features of a bridge.

In short, CSI 12<sup>19</sup> is yet another lexical item that Heaney uses not only to stress the foreignizing character he endows his translation with, but also to project the cultural material of his native Ireland to give it an identity of its own.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The study of the CSIs comprising the corpus of the present research reveals that a foreignizing effect predominates in the process of adaptation of the original *Beowulf*’s sociocultural values to those of the Anglo-American target-language culture. This is due to the use of Hibernicisms, terms belonging to a minority English-language variety, to translate such CSIs. To achieve the adaptation of the source text to the target text, Heaney relies on a very specific variety of translation strategies. Among those cited by Bastin (7), Heaney mainly employs “transcription of the original”, “exoticism” and “creation” with a foreignizing purpose; among those cited by Aixelá (61-64), he applies “repetition”, “extratextual gloss”, “limited universalization” and “compensation”. The translator’s application of these strategies stems from the fact that they allow 1) introducing linguistic elements foreign to the target-language culture that reveal the sociocultural traits characteristic of the source-language culture, as in the case of “transcription of the original”, “exoticism” and “repetition”; and 2) that the foreignized translated terms are not totally unintelligible to the target-language readership, thus finding signification spaces close to both the source-language and target-language cultures, as in the case of “limited universalization”, “creation” and “compensation”.

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<sup>19</sup> “frecne fengelad, ðær fyrgenstream” (Kiernan line 1361), “and treacherous keshes, where cold streams” (Heaney, “The Text of *Beowulf*” 37 line 1359).

It should also be noted that Heaney's translation includes a domesticating effect, since the target language is Standard English. The translation strategies adopted are mainly "updating"—according to Bastin—and "absolute universalization"—according to Aixelá. This means that Heaney prioritizes "transparency" and "fluency" (Venuti, *The Translator's* 1) in the translated text by substituting the codes and values of the source-language culture for others more akin to the target-language culture. However, although this seems to imply the subjugation of the Anglo-Saxon sociocultural system reflected in the original *Beowulf* to the Anglo-American dominant discourse, in this case the challenge imposed by Heaney to the dominant power acquires greater relevance: he claims a linguistic and discursive use belonging to a minority culture such as the Northern Irish one.

The results prove the hypothesis underlying this research. The use of Hibernicisms as a solution to the cross-cultural problems implied by the CSIs highlights Heaney's double aim in his translation: on the one hand, the unusual and foreign character of the Irish dialectal words for the Anglo-American readership brings to light the source-language culture latent in the target text; on the other hand, the application of Hibernicisms suggests that Heaney intends to give a voice of its own to that Irish identity lost during British domination, and that the first step is to provide greater visibility to his nation's own linguistic and discursive forms.

In short, the analysis of Heaney's translation contributes substantially to Translation Studies because it stands as a form of translation undermining the domesticating tradition of the current translating practice developed in the Anglo-American sphere discussed by Venuti (*The Translator's* 21). According to him (23), we can affirm that the foreignizing translation task practiced by Heaney does not imply a total rejection of any cultural political agenda. On the contrary, his eagerness for the introduction of Irish sociocultural and linguistic codes in the target text reflects his evidently political concerns against the cultural dispossession carried out by the dominant British power. However, Heaney's *Beowulf* shows that it is possible to "develop a theory and practice of translation that resists dominant target-language cultural values so as to signify the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text" (23), as well as, in Heaney's specific case, of the Irish sociocultural and ideological system vis-à-vis the Anglo-American codes omnipresent today.

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