

TRANSLATING THE DA VINCI CODE INTO ALBANIAN: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO VERSIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines two Albanian translations of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*: the version by Amik Kasaruho (Botimet Dudaj) and the version by Perikli Jorgoni (Bota Shqiptare). Drawing on translation theory (Hatim & Munday, 2004) and later scholarship on equivalence and translation strategies, the analysis identifies how modulation, amplification, borrowing, faithful translation, and free translation were applied in each text. Data were collected through comparative textual analysis of selected passages, with particular attention to syntactic structure, lexical choice, and cultural transfer. The results indicate that Jorgoni frequently employed word-for-word translation strategies, often preserving source-language syntax at the expense of fluency in Albanian. In contrast, Kasaruho combined semantic and communicative strategies to produce a more idiomatic and natural text for Albanian readers. The study concludes that translation strategies directly influence reader reception and underscores the importance of balancing fidelity to the source with readability in the target language.

Key words: translation strategies, modulation, borrowing, The Da Vinci Code, Albanian translation

PËRMBLEDHJE

Ky artikull shqyrton dy përkthime në gjuhën shqipe të romanit *The Da Vinci Code* nga Dan Brown: versionin e Amik Kasaruhos (Botimet Dudaj) dhe versionin e Perikli Jorgonit (Bota Shqiptare). Duke u mbështetur në teorinë e përkthimit (Hatim & Munday, 2004) dhe hulumtimet e mëtejshme mbi barazinë dhe strategjitë e përkthimit, analiza identifikon se si janë përdorur modifikimi, amplifikimi, huazimi, përkthimi besnik dhe përkthimi i lirë. Të dhënat janë mbledhur përmes analizës krahasuese të pasazheve të zgjedhura, me vëmendje ndaj strukturës sintaksore, zgjedhjes leksikore dhe transferimit kulturor. Rezultatet tregojnë se Jorgoni ka përdorur shpesh strategji të përkthimit fjalë për fjalë, duke ruajtur shpesh sintaksën e gjuhës burimore në dëm të rrjedhshmërisë së gjuhës së synuar. Në kontrast, Kasaruho ka kombinuar strategji semantike dhe komunikative për të prodhuar një tekst më idiomatik dhe më të natyrshëm për lexuesit shqiptarë. Studimi arrin në përfundimin se strategjitë e përkthimit ndikojnë drejtpërdrejt në pranimin e librit nga lexuesit dhe thekson rëndësinë e balancimit të besnikërisë ndaj burimit me lexueshmërinë në gjuhën e synuar.

Fjalët çelës: strategjitë e përkthimit, modifikimi, huazimi, *The Da Vinci Code*, përkthimi në shqip

1. Introduction

Literary translation plays a pivotal role in bridging linguistic and cultural divides, enabling ideas and narratives to circulate globally (Baker, 2011; Venuti, 2012). The demand for translated fiction has steadily increased, reflecting readers' interest in diverse perspectives (Pym, 2023). Translation, however, is never ideologically neutral: translators mediate cultural norms and values, and publishing practices often privilege fluent domestication, which can obscure source-culture differences (Venuti, 1995, 2012). Since the “cultural turn” in translation studies, scholars have emphasized that translators must render not only linguistic content but also embedded cultural elements, highlighting translation's ideological dimension (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1998).

Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* exemplifies a translation object with a vast global impact. Branded a “theological thriller” for its mix of suspense and provocative religious symbolism, it became a publishing phenomenon upon release in 2003, selling 6.8 million copies in its first year and reaching over 80 million copies worldwide in more than 40 languages. The novel's controversial claims regarding Christianity and history sparked international debates and led to bans or censorship in several countries. Beyond controversy, its influence extended to cultural tourism: nearly half of the visitors to Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland reported being motivated by the novel or its film adaptation. This global reach and cultural impact make *The Da Vinci Code* an ideal case study for examining translation strategies in different linguistic and cultural settings.

2. Literature Review

Eugene Nida's (1964) framework distinguished between formal equivalence (focusing on linguistic accuracy and form) and dynamic equivalence (prioritizing equivalent effect on the target audience). Dynamic equivalence aims for a receptor response comparable to that of source-text readers. Similarly, Newmark (1988) differentiated between semantic translation, which privileges precision and nuance, and communicative translation, which emphasizes naturalness and reader engagement. Both frameworks underscore the tension between literal fidelity and idiomatic fluency, a tension central to literary translation.

Hans Vermeer's Skopos theory posits that the purpose of the translation (its “skopos”) should determine translation strategies (Vermeer, 1989/2000). Translation is viewed as a goal-oriented action: if the purpose is to entertain, educate, or preserve stylistic effects, the translator adapts accordingly. In literary translation, this may justify deviation from strict equivalence to meet target-audience needs (Nord, 1997).

Venuti (1995) framed translation strategy as an ethical choice between domestication (producing a fluent, natural target text that conceals its foreign

origin) and foreignization (preserving source-culture strangeness). He argued that domestication risks erasing cultural differences, while foreignization confronts readers with the text's foreignness, encouraging intercultural awareness. In translating a novel like *The Da Vinci Code*, which abounds with culturally charged terminology, this choice is especially significant.

Translation has played a central role in Albania's cultural development; Shala (2021) emphasizes that translation was pivotal during the National Awakening, shaping both linguistic norms and national identity. Today, literary translation represents a substantial portion of the Albanian publishing market, yet it remains restricted by a persistent tension between fidelity to the source text and readability for the target audience. Tanku (2013) frames this tension briefly by identifying two dominant practical orientations among Albanian translators, the equivalence approach and the cultural approach, and observing that, in practice, many translators lean toward the cultural strategy to maximize domestic readership; at the same time he warns that rapid, large-scale translation practices can produce unnecessary borrowings and a loss of the source text's functional intent. These observations complement the work of other Albanian scholars: Xhevat Lloshi documents ongoing difficulties in rendering culturally-specific references, and Kanani (2015), in her analysis of Kasoraho's Dan Brown translations, highlights the frequent need for creative solutions when transferring locally-inflected terms. Together, these studies demonstrate that theoretical models of equivalence, function, and cultural orientation are not merely abstract frames but have direct, practical relevance for the Albanian translation context, and they call for more reflective editorial and ethical standards in publishing practice.

3. Methodology

This study employs a comparative textual-analysis design to evaluate translation strategies, equivalence, and stylistic choices (Hatim & Munday, 2004). The analysis proceeded in four operational stages: (1) corpus construction, (2) development of a coding scheme, (3) independent coding with reliability testing, and (4) comparative analysis.

The source text (ST) is Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (Doubleday, 2003; ISBN 0-385-50420-9). Two Albanian target texts were selected: Amik Kasoraho, *Kodi i Da Vinçit* (Botimet Dudaj, 2004; ISBN 978-99943-33-03-8) and Perikli Jorgoni, *Kodi i Da Vinçit* (Bota Shqiptare, 2004; ISBN 99927-910-5-5). Forty (40) segments were selected using purposive sampling across different chapters to ensure representativeness. Selection criteria included:

1. Stylistic density – passages where figurative language, idioms, or register shifts occur.

2. Cultural specificity – references to art, religion, rituals, or historical elements.
3. Linguistic complexity –sentences involving non-literal meaning, wordplay, or syntactic ambiguity.

Translation strategies were identified and categorized according to the typology proposed by Hatim and Munday (2004), supplemented by Newmark (1988) and Venuti (1995). The following categories were applied:

- Modulation: semantic shifts or changes in perspective.
- Amplification: addition of explanatory elements absent in the ST.
- Borrowing: direct transfer of lexical items.
- Free translation: restructuring to prioritize naturalness.
- Calque: literal rendering of collocations or compounds.
- Omission: exclusion of lexical or cultural elements.

Each passage was examined for the presence of these strategies. When a passage exhibited multiple strategies, the dominant one was recorded. For each selected segment, the ST was aligned with TT1 and TT2.

The analysis was conducted at three levels: (1) lexical equivalence, where choice of words and idiomaticity were examined; (2) syntactic restructuring, where sentence-level reordering, subject–object shifts, and clause embedding were analysed; (3) cultural transfer, where the translation of culturally-bound items (CBIs), explicitation, and domestication versus foreignization moves were evaluated. For each segment, strategy frequency counts were recorded and narrative comparative commentary was produced to illustrate how semantic fidelity and target-language naturalness were balanced by TT1 and TT2. Where applicable, qualitative comparisons were supplemented with simple descriptive statistics (counts and percentages) to highlight dominant tendencies across the corpus.

Comparative evaluation focused on how each translator balanced semantic fidelity with target-language naturalness, drawing on Nida's (1964) equivalence framework and Venuti's (1995) domestication/foreignization dichotomy.

To ensure analytical rigor, passages were coded independently by the author and later cross-checked against established definitions of strategies. Where ambiguity arose, multiple interpretations were discussed in light of prior studies (e.g., Nord, 1997; Baker, 2011). This triangulation of theoretical sources strengthens the reliability of categorization and reduces subjectivity.

4. Analysis

4.1 Modulation

- SL: “Despite the lousy timing” (Chapter 9)
- Kasaruho (TT1): “Megjithë çastin e palumtur”
- Jorgoni (TT2): “Edhe pse çasti nuk ishte shumë i përshtatshëm”

Both TTs preserve propositional content but employ different modulation tactics. TT2 implements a syntactic-explicit modulation by expanding the evaluative element into a negated scalar construction (“nuk ishte shumë i përshtatshëm”), which increases explicitation and reduces idiomatic register. TT1 uses near-literal rendering (“çastin e palumtur”) that preserves source idiomality but introduces marginal semantic awkwardness in Albanian collocation.

4.2 Structural Shifts

- SL: “Fache’s anger stalled momentarily.” (Chapter 9)
- TT1: “Për një çast Fashi harroi zemërimin.”
- TT2: “Për një çast Fashi e harroi mërinë.”

Both translations reposition the experiencer (“Fache”) as a grammatical subject, affecting a shift from genitive possession to subject–verb construction. The two TTs differ in lexical choice for ‘anger’ (zemërim vs. mëria). TT1 selects a register-neutral noun with idiomatic collocation; TT2 chooses a somewhat archaic/marked variant.

4.3 Linguistic Amplification

- SL: “He staggered.” (Chapter 34)
- Both TT1 and TT2: “Mezi mbërriti.”

Both translators rendered the single-verb English item with a two-word Albanian paraphrase, reflecting a conceptual gap in direct lexical equivalence. The paraphrase introduces a trajectory implication absent in the ST.

4.4 Borrowing and Faithful Translation

- SL: “Curator” (Prologue)
- TT1 (Kasaruho): Kurator (borrowed)
- TT2 (Jorgoni): Mbarështues (domesticated)

TT1 implements lexical borrowing, preserving source-form recognizability. TT2 replaces the lexical item with an Albanian equivalent, increasing semantic

transparency for monolingual readers.

4.5 Free Translation and Meaning Shifts

- SL: “I wish it left sooner” / “Lyon will have to do” (Chapter 35)
- TT1: “Gjynah që nuk niset më përpara” / “por, sidoqoftë, shkojmë në Lile”
- TT2: “Sa keq që nuk niset më parë” / “sepse Lila është shumë i mirë”

TT1 generally preserves pragmatic orientation and pragmatic implicature. TT2 exhibits localized meaning shifts (e.g., adding an evaluative clause “sepse Lila është shumë i mirë”) that alter illocutionary force.

4.6 Cultural Elements

- SL: Hieros Gamos (“Sacred marriage”) (Chapter 74)
- Both TT1 and TT2: Martesë e shenjtë

Both translators preserve the cultural reference while providing a literal rendering.

Table 1. Comparative Table

Translation Aspect	Source Text Example	Kasaruho (Dudaj)	Jorgoni (Bota Shqiptare)	Observations
Modulation	“Despite the lousy timing”	Megjithë çastin e palumtur	Edhe pse çasti nuk ishte shumë i përshtatshëm	Jorgoni applies modulation; Kasaruho literal.
Structural Shift	“Fache’s anger stalled momentarily”	Për një çast Fashi harroi zemërimin	Për një çast Fashi e harroi mërinë	Both restructure syntax; meaning preserved.
Amplification	“Staggered”	Mezi mbërriti	Mezi mbërriti	Both use paraphrase.
Borrowing	“Curator”	Kurator (borrowed)	Mbarështues (Albanian equivalent)	Kasaruho faithful; Jorgoni domesticating.

Free Translation	“I wish it left sooner”	Gjynah që nuk niset më përpara	Sa keq që nuk niset më parë	Kasaruho conveys idiomatic naturalness.
Cultural Transfer	“Hieros Gamos”	Martesë e shenjtë	Martesë e shenjtë	Both retain cultural meaning.

Table 2. Frequency of translation strategies across the two Albanian versions of *The Da Vinci Code*

<i>Translation Strategy</i>	<i>Kasaruho (Botimet Dudaj)</i>	<i>Jorgoni (Bota Shqiptare)</i>	<i>Observed Pattern</i>
Modulation	3 occurrences	6 occurrences	<i>Jorgoni shows greater reliance on modulation to restructure meaning, enhancing idiomaticity but occasionally diverging semantically.</i>
Structural Shift	5 occurrences	5 occurrences	<i>Both translators frequently restructure syntax (e.g., subject/object shifts) to maintain fluency.</i>
Amplification (paraphrase)	4 occurrences	4 occurrences	<i>Both employ amplification when Albanian lacks a direct equivalent, consistent with dynamic equivalence.</i>
Borrowing (foreignizing)	6 occurrences	2 occurrences	<i>Kasaruho prefers borrowing international terms (e.g., kurator), preserving source-culture markers.</i>

Free Translation	5 occurrences	3 occurrences	<i>Kasaruho more often adapts idiomatically to ensure naturalness, aligning with communicative translation.</i>
Calque (loan translation)	3 occurrences	3 occurrences	<i>Both reproduce collocations literally; neutral but limited cultural adaptation.</i>
Omission	2 occurrences	2 occurrences	<i>Both omit minor descriptive details, likely for readability.</i>
Total segments analysed	40	40	<i>Balanced sampling across both versions.</i>

5. Conclusion

This study compared two Albanian translations of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* to evaluate how different translation strategies influence textual fidelity, idiomatic fluency, and cultural transfer. The analysis demonstrated that Perikli Jorgoni's version tends to rely on word-for-word renderings and literal equivalence. While this approach preserves formal structures, it frequently results in reduced naturalness and occasional foreignness for target readers. By contrast, Amik Kasaruho's translation combines semantic precision with communicative adaptation, producing a text that is both contextually accurate and idiomatically fluent.

Jorgoni's strategy reflects a formal/semantic orientation, whereas Kasaruho achieves a functional balance closer to dynamic/communicative equivalence. In addition, Jorgoni leans toward foreignization, while Kasaruho adopts a more domesticated yet culturally resonant approach.

The study contributes to translation scholarship by highlighting how strategic variation among translators can reshape the reception of a globally controversial novel in the Albanian literary system. The results underscore the importance of methodological flexibility in literary translation, particularly when dealing with texts rich in cultural and theological symbolism.

Future research should expand beyond textual analysis to include reader-response studies, reception surveys, or cross-linguistic comparisons with other Balkan translations. Such studies would provide further insight into how global bestsellers are localized for diverse audiences and how translation strategies affect cultural interpretation across contexts.

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