



Translating Popular-Cultural Specificity in the Postcolonial Novel: A Corpus-Based Reappraisal of Mouloud Feraoun's 'Le Fils du Pauvre' and Nisrin Shukri's Ibn al-Faqir

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Abstract

This article investigates the French–Arabic translation of popular-cultural specificity in Mouloud Feraoun's *Le Fils du Pauvre* (1954) and Nisrin Shukri's Arabic translation *Ibn al-Faqir* (2014). "Popular" is used here not as a synonym for commercially formulaic fiction, but to designate a novelistic poetics grounded in the everyday lifeworld, oral memory, material culture, kinship, customary institutions, and vernacular knowledge of a rural Kabyle community. The study undertakes a secondary corpus reanalysis of the 38 source-culture lexical types and 64 target-text translation events identified by Zitouni and Almutairi (2022), supplementing their etymological account with a functional model informed by Aixelá's culture-specific items, Berman's ethics of foreignness, postcolonial heterolingualism, and narrative analysis. The corpus comprises Kabyle items, items shared by Kabyle and Algerian Arabic, and Arabic-derived words refunctionalised in French. Quantitative evidence shows that literal translation accounts for 50% of recorded solutions, borrowing for 29.68%, mistranslation for 12.5%, superordinate terms for 6.25%, and adaptation for 1.56%. Close analysis of *akoufi*, *karouba*, *chouari*, *fouta*, *gandoura*, *djema/tajma't*, *amin*, *marabout*, *roumi*, and *taleb* demonstrates that denotational approximation frequently coexists with cultural attenuation. The article proposes the "cultural-return paradox": when a French text returns Arabic-origin words to Modern Standard Arabic, graphic familiarity may conceal semantic change, Algerian vernacular history, and Kabyle institutional meaning. It argues that successful translation requires layered restitution rather than automatic domestication: calibrated retention, concise contextual glossing, consistency, and paratextual support. The findings reposition the translator as an ethnographic and postcolonial mediator and offer a replicable framework for studying culturally dense Maghrebi fiction across French and Arabic.

Keywords: culture-specific items; literary translation; popular culture; Mouloud Feraoun; *Le Fils du Pauvre*; French–Arabic translation; Kabyle culture; heterolingualism; postcolonial translation.

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Introduction

The translation of popular-cultural specificity in the novel is often described as a problem of finding equivalents for food, dress, customs, and institutions. Such a

description is necessary but insufficient. In culturally embedded fiction, a word is rarely a detachable label. It can mark a social relation, activate oral memory, locate a speaker within a region, or make the language of the former colonial power carry knowledge that it once excluded. Translating the item therefore changes not only reference but also narrative voice, cultural authority, and the distribution of knowledge between narrator and reader.

Mouloud Feraoun's *Le Fils du Pauvre* offers an especially productive French–Arabic case. First published at the author's expense in 1950 and republished in a revised form by Seuil in 1954, the autobiographically inflected novel recounts the childhood and education of Fouroulou Menrad in a poor Kabyle mountain community (Feraoun, 1954; Mathieu-Job, 2023). Its narrative alternates between an individual “I” and a communal “we”; description consequently performs an ethnographic and sociological function as well as an autobiographical one (Porras Medrano, 2001). Domestic interiors, food storage, clothing, kinship, village deliberation, religious authority, proverbs, and relations to schooling are not ornamental background. They are the material through which poverty, dignity, collective discipline, and colonial inequality become narratable.

The French source text is already translational. It inserts Kabyle and Algerian Arabic words, carries Arabic-derived forms naturalized in French, and paraphrases cultural knowledge for a readership not presumed to share it. Postcolonial fiction of this kind has been described as writing that evokes more than one language beneath a seemingly monolingual surface (Mehrez, 1992; Tymoczko, 2002). The Arabic translation is therefore not a simple movement from French into Arabic. It is a second mediation of content that has already travelled from Kabyle and Algerian lifeworlds into a French literary structure.

This second mediation creates a distinctive problem. An Arabic-origin word such as *amin*, *cadi*, *baraka*, or *taleb* may look familiar when returned to Arabic script, yet its value in colonial Algeria, Kabyle social organisation, or French usage may no longer coincide with a contemporary reader's default interpretation. Conversely, an exclusively Kabyle word may be semantically explained by a common Arabic noun while losing its indexical connection to village history. Graphic familiarity and dictionary equivalence can thus conceal cultural non-equivalence.

The present article develops a corpus-based reappraisal of Nisrin Shukri's 2014 Arabic translation, *Ibn al-Faqir*, issued by Egypt's National Center for Translation. It reanalyses the published inventory compiled by Zitouni and Almutairi (2022): 38 source lexical types and 64 recorded translation events distributed across Kabyle, Kabyle–Algerian Arabic, and Arabic-derived strata. Rather than merely asking whether a word has been rendered correctly, the article asks what cultural work the word performs and whether that work remains recoverable in Arabic.

Four questions guide the study: (1) Which domains of popular culture are encoded by the selected items? (2) Which procedures organise their Arabic transfer? (3) Under what conditions do literal translation and apparent “return” to Arabic weaken cultural specificity? (4) What translation model can preserve readability while respecting the text's heterolingual and postcolonial structure? The central argument is that adequacy requires layered cultural restitution: denotation, social function, indexical locality, narrative distribution, and historical memory must be considered together.

Literature review

In this part of the study, two main concepts are discussed: Popular Culture (in the Novel), Corpus, and Context:

1. Popular Culture and the Novel

The expression “popular novelist” is terminologically unstable. It may denote a best-selling writer, a producer of genre fiction, a writer from or about subaltern communities,

or an author whose work draws on folklore and everyday practices. This study adopts the last two senses and uses “popular-cultural novel” for prose that textualises non-elite lifeworlds and vernacular systems of knowledge. This operational definition avoids placing Feraoun within the commercial category of popular fiction. His work is popular-cultural because ordinary collective life supplies its lexicon, ethics, spaces, and narrative memory.

Popular culture in *Le Fils du pauvre* is not a catalogue of picturesque survivals. The house, grain jar, brazier, garment, village assembly, kin group, seasonal labour, blessing, saintly authority, and proverb form a social grammar. They regulate access to food, division of labour, respect, belonging, conflict, and aspiration. When such elements are generalized, the translation risks replacing an organised cultural world with ethnographic décor. The difference between “a basket” and a pannier placed on a donkey, or between “a neighbourhood” and a kin-based *karouba*, is a difference in social history.

The term culture-specific item (CSI) designates an element whose function or connotations create a transfer problem because the target culture lacks the referent or assigns it a different intertextual status (Aixelá, 1996). Aixelá arranges procedures broadly along conservation and substitution: repetition, orthographic adaptation, linguistic translation, and glossing preserve varying degrees of source specificity, whereas synonymy, universalisation, naturalisation, deletion, and autonomous creation move toward target-culture substitution. The taxonomy is valuable, but culturally returning items require an additional question: does the apparent target-language equivalent recover the source situation or merely recover an etymon?

Newmark’s (1988) categories of cultural words and Baker’s (2018) account of non-equivalence help distinguish denotative content from expressive, presupposed, and evoked meaning. A target term can denote an object accurately while changing register, social geography, or affect. The Arabic *إناء* ‘vessel,’ for example, can describe an *akoufi* at a general level, but it does not evoke the built-in earthen grain container associated with household wealth and fecundity in Kabyle material culture. Semantic correctness is therefore scalar, not binary.

Berman’s critique of ethnocentric translation adds an ethical dimension. Rationalisation, clarification, qualitative impoverishment, destruction of vernacular networks, and effacement of superimposed languages can make a translation smoother while weakening the foreign work’s mode of signification (Berman, 2000). Venuti (2018) similarly argues that fluent domestication can conceal translation and assimilate difference to receiving norms. Neither position requires mechanical literalism. It requires attention to the literary function of strangeness and to the institutional power determining which differences remain visible.

The postcolonial frame is indispensable because Feraoun’s French is not culturally neutral. Postcolonial writers appropriate metropolitan languages by importing indigenous words, semantic patterns, oral genres, and presupposed knowledge (Ashcroft et al., 2002). Heterolingualism is thus a discursive strategy rather than a count of foreign forms: it negotiates alterity and produces different degrees of access for monolingual and bilingual readers (Grutman, 1997; Suchet, 2014). A translation that eliminates every Kabyle or Algerian trace may communicate events while reversing the politics of the source style.

2. Corpus and Context

Feraoun was born in Tizi Hibel in 1913, trained as a teacher, and wrote in French while maintaining a sustained attachment to Kabyle cultural memory. His novels describe peasant life, migration, honour, education, family, and the pressures of colonial society; his broader work also includes essays, tales, a journal, and engagement with Kabyle

poetry (Mathieu-Job, 2023). *Le Fils du pauvre* is semi-autobiographical, but its significance exceeds individual testimony. The protagonist's trajectory is repeatedly situated as one life resembling thousands of others, and the narrative turns private recollection into collective documentation.

Porras Medrano (2001) identifies two interacting registers: the autobiographical "I" and the sociological "we." The work's descriptive passages represent dwellings, village topography, clothes, bodies, and institutions with ethnographic precision, while implicitly comparing Kabyle poverty with the Western world addressed by the French text. This dual address is crucial for translation. Some source explanations are directed at an external French reader; an Arabic translation must decide whether to retain them, reduce them, or redirect them to an Arab reader who may share religious vocabulary but not Kabyle institutions.

The source edition used by the published corpus study is the 1954 *Seuil* text. This edition differs from the 1950 self-published version: the later publication removed a third section and replaced it with a shorter conclusion (Mathieu-Job, 2023). The target text is Shukri's *Ibn al-Faqir*, published in Cairo in 2014. Earlier Arabic versions exist, including Jurj Salim's 1962 translation and Muhammad 'Ajina's Tunisian version; the existence of multiple translations confirms the novel's sustained Arab circulation and makes retranslation comparison a promising future direction.

Zitouni and Almutairi's (2022) dataset classifies 38 lexical types by linguistic origin: three Kabyle-only items, nine shared by Kabyle and Algerian Arabic, and twenty-six shared across Kabyle, Algerian Arabic, and older Arabic strata. Because items recur and receive more than one rendering, the target dataset contains 64 translation events. Their reported distribution is: literal translation, 32 events (50%); borrowing, 19 (29.68%); mistranslation, eight (12.5%); superordinate term, four (6.25%); and adaptation, one (1.56%).

This article does not claim a new full-text concordance. It performs a transparent secondary reanalysis of that published dataset, checks selected source contexts against the 1954 text, and reframes the findings through cultural function and narrative consequence. This scope is methodologically preferable to presenting inaccessible or copyright-restricted full-text data as an independently compiled corpus. It also permits the study to test a conceptual proposition—the cultural-return paradox—against a clearly delimited and replicable set of examples.

Methodology

The design combines descriptive translation studies with qualitative corpus analysis. The unit of analysis is not simply the isolated lexeme but the culture-bearing translation event: a source item, its immediate narrative function, the target solution reported for that context, and the cultural effect of the relation between them. Quantitative results reproduce the frequencies documented by Zitouni and Almutairi (2022); no inferential claim is made from a small purposive corpus.

The first analytical layer codes cultural domain. Six domains emerged from the data: (a) material and domestic culture; (b) food and subsistence; (c) dress and embodied identity; (d) kinship and address; (e) customary, political, and religious institutions; and (f) ethnolinguistic naming and social alterity. An item can belong to more than one domain. *Akoufi*, for example, is an object, a storage technology, a sign of household economy, and a gendered site of domestic authority.

The second layer codes procedure using a harmonised scheme based on Aixelá (1996), Newmark (1988), and the published categories: retention/borrowing; semantic transfer or literal translation; explanatory expansion; generalisation through a superordinate; cultural adaptation; and erroneous substitution. Retention and explanation tend toward

conservation; generalisation and adaptation tend toward substitution. Literal translation remains indeterminate until its cultural effect is assessed.

The third layer evaluates cultural effect across five dimensions. Referential adequacy asks whether the target identifies the object or institution. Functional adequacy asks whether it represents what the referent does in community life. Indexical adequacy asks whether locality, group identity, and register remain perceptible. Narrative adequacy examines recurrence, characterisation, focalisation, and explanatory distribution. Ethical-historical adequacy considers whether colonial language contact and indigenous specificity are made visible or silently neutralised.

A target solution is classified as layered restitution when it sustains at least the denotative and social-functional levels while providing a route—through retention, context, or paratext—to the indexical level. Cultural attenuation occurs when a solution remains broadly intelligible but loses locality or institutionality. Cultural displacement occurs when the target activates a substantially different referent. This qualitative distinction prevents every literal form from being counted automatically as either success or failure.

The approach is constrained by the absence of a machine-readable licensed copy of the complete Arabic target text and by reliance on a previously published inventory. It cannot establish total frequencies for all cultural phenomena in the novel, especially proverbs, syntax, oral rhythm, and narratorial explicitation. The results are therefore analytical propositions grounded in the lexical dataset, not a definitive audit of the entire translation. This limitation is made explicit because reproducibility and source transparency are essential for high-quality literary translation research.

Discussion

The findings confirm that procedure frequencies do not by themselves establish a translation's cultural orientation. The 29.68% borrowing rate suggests substantial retention, yet several borrowings return Arabic-derived forms and do not necessarily preserve Kabyle difference. The 50% literal rate ranges from successful restoration to cultural attenuation. Quantitative strategy labels must therefore be interpreted through social function, narrative role, and reader positioning.

The analysis also reframes "untranslatability." Akoufi, karouba, and tajma't are not impossible to translate. What is impossible is compressing all their material, institutional, affective, and historical meanings into one context-free Arabic word. Translation becomes feasible when meaning is distributed across transliteration, phrase, context, recurrence, and paratext. Untranslatability is thus a design constraint rather than a prohibition.

A further implication concerns literary style. Feraoun's ethnographic detail has sometimes been read as transparent documentation, yet narrative analysis shows that description mediates between a Kabyle community and an external reader, and that the "I" repeatedly expands into a collective "we" (Porrás Medrano, 2001). Cultural items participate in this expansion. Erasing them reduces not only local colour but also the novel's movement from individual memory to collective representation.

The Arabic target occupies an ambivalent position. It can restore semantic networks obscured in French, particularly Qur'anic, religious, and Arabic-derived associations. It can also impose a standardising centre that absorbs Algerian and Kabyle difference. The task is therefore not to choose Arabic against French, or familiarity against foreignness, but to make visible the layered contact zone from which the novel emerged.

The study's contribution is the concept of layered cultural restitution. Existing models classify procedures; the proposed model assesses the depth of what returns. A translation can preserve the referent but lose function, preserve function but lose locality, or preserve locality while overloading the narrative with explanation. The

optimal solution is proportionate: it protects features relevant to the novel's poetics and supports readers only where context cannot carry the burden.

The study also demonstrates the value of retranslation research. Comparing Shukri's version with Salim's 1962 and 'Ajina's Tunisian translation could reveal how geography and historical moment alter the handling of Maghrebi forms. An Algerian or Tunisian translator may recognise items unfamiliar to an Egyptian translator, but proximity does not guarantee preservation; local publishers may normalise dialectal forms for pan-Arab circulation. A parallel corpus of the three Arabic versions would permit robust testing of the cultural-return paradox.

Results

The numerical profile reveals an apparent preference for semantic accessibility. Half of all recorded solutions are literal, while almost one third use borrowing. These figures might suggest a balance between domestication and foreignisation, but procedure alone is misleading. Borrowing can be opaque or misspelled; literal translation can recover social function or erase it; an Arabic-looking form can be etymologically familiar yet contextually false. Close analysis is therefore necessary.

The Kabyle-only group exposes the cost of replacing culturally dense objects with generic Arabic. Akoufi refers to a large earthen storage structure used for cereals and figs in the traditional house. Renderings such as 'large vessel,' 'storage vessels,' or 'jars' communicate size or function, yet remove the Kabyle name and its association with household wealth, fecundity, and domestic organisation. A layered solution would retain *أكوفي* on first occurrence and add a concise intratextual description such as 'the large earthen grain store,' allowing later occurrences to stand unglossed.

Effer, the Kabyle verb connected to the protagonist's name Fouroulou, illustrates onomastic motivation. Retention is necessary because the narrative comments on the form and meaning of the name; however, an inaccurate Arabic transcription weakens the explanation it is supposed to support. Proper names in heterolingual fiction are not semantically empty. They can create covert bilingualism, and the translator must coordinate transcription, etymology, and narrative gloss (Tymoczko, 2002).

Karouba is more than a 'district' or 'families.' It combines spatial, genealogical, and political meanings: a cluster of related households and a constituent unit of village organisation. Translating it merely as *حي* 'neighbourhood' makes the text readable but converts kin-based structure into modern urban geography. Retaining *الكاروبا* with a first-occurrence gloss—'a kin-based quarter comprising several related households'—better preserves institutional density.

Objects shared between Kabyle and Algerian Arabic reveal another pattern. Chouari was rendered by *قفة*, a generic basket. In context, however, the item is a pannier carried on an animal for heavy loads. The superordinate removes the relation among object, animal labour, terrain, and subsistence. Fouta was rendered through terms corresponding to a head covering or handkerchief, displacing a large cloth worn by Kabyle women around the waist. The error is not simply lexical: it relocates clothing on the body and alters the visual representation of gendered labour.

Gandoura and gourbi receive both general and more specific forms. *كسوة* 'clothing' and *منزل* 'house' are understandable, but their generality suppresses local colour and class marking. *جلباب* may evoke a different garment for some Arabic readers, while *خص* 'hut' can signal material poverty but not necessarily the Maghrebi dwelling type. A consistent transliteration-plus-context strategy would avoid oscillating between unrelated Arabic prototypes.

Food terms fare better when they already circulate transregionally. Couscous is returned as *الكسكسي* and remains recognisable, while belboul is borrowed and explained as a cheaper barley preparation. The contrast supports a functional principle: reader

familiarity should determine the amount of gloss, not the mere fact that a word can be written in Arabic characters. A culturally local food can be retained without obstructing reading when the narrative supplies ingredients, preparation, or social occasion.

Kinship and address terms demonstrate the value of retention but also the risk of false pan-Arab equivalence. Nana is retained as نانا for a respected maternal aunt. The surrounding narrative helps identify the relationship, so preservation maintains voice and locality. By contrast, translating every local address term with a standard kinship label can remove age, respect, affection, and regional identity. Arabic dialects share resources, but shared forms do not guarantee identical pragmatic force.

The most consequential difficulties occur in customary institutions. Djema or tajma't denotes the village assembly, a deliberative body embedded in Kabyle political organisation. Renderings such as 'council,' 'council of elders,' or 'municipal council' recover only parts of the institution and may anachronistically bureaucratise it. A form such as «تاجماعت، مجلس القرية العرفي» at first occurrence preserves the indigenous name and states its function without pretending that it is equivalent to a modern municipality.

Amin likewise appears transparent because أمين exists in Arabic, but transparency is deceptive. In the village context, the referent is an office holder associated with collective administration, not simply a morally 'trustworthy' person. The translation should activate the institutional sense, for example «الأمين، رئيس مجلس القرية», according to the precise context. The same reasoning applies to caïd and cadi: Arabic etymology does not erase historical distinctions among administrative authority, judicial office, and colonial governance.

Religious vocabulary displays the cultural-return paradox most clearly. Baraka, Fatiha, muezzin, cheikh, and zaouia can often be restored through established Arabic forms, but their local collocations and institutional scope still require attention. Marabout is especially unstable. In French Maghrebi usage, it may designate a saintly person, religious specialist, or shrine associated with a saint. Renderings equivalent to 'charlatan,' 'sorcerer,' or a literalised 'bound person' impose unrelated evaluations. Context must determine whether مرابط, شيخ طريقة, ولي, or ضريح is appropriate; no single Arabic reflex works in every occurrence.

Roumi encodes alterity historically. Depending on speaker and period, it may refer to a Roman, Christian, European, Westerner, or specifically a French person. Rendering it as 'Turk' reverses the relation; translating it systematically as 'Frenchman' can overspecify; 'Westerner' can erase religious and colonial resonance. The target should follow focalisation and historical setting, perhaps retaining رومي where it is intelligible and allowing context to identify the referent.

Taleb shows how Arabic return can produce polysemy rather than equivalence. In MSA, طالب commonly means student, but Maghrebi taleb can designate a Qur'anic teacher, literate religious specialist, or person trained in traditional learning. Selecting تلميذ reduces status; شيخ may overstate age or authority; طالب reproduces the form while inviting the wrong contemporary sense. «الطالب، معلم القرآن» or another contextual gloss can reactivate the local institution.

The dataset also indicates inconsistency: one item may be borrowed in one passage, generalised in another, and mistranslated elsewhere. Variation is not automatically a flaw, because contextual meaning can change. Yet unexplained oscillation fragments the cultural system. When burnous alternates between برنس and a general 'cloak,' or when djema alternates among several modern council terms, readers cannot build stable cultural knowledge. A project glossary should record referent, accepted Arabic form, variant conditioned by context, and first-occurrence explanation.

In summary, the main loss is not always referential. Many Arabic solutions permit a reader to follow the plot. The deeper loss concerns relational meaning: how an object

connects to labour, how a quarter connects to descent, how a title connects to authority, how a garment connects to gendered practice, and how a borrowed word makes French carry an indigenous presence. This is cultural attenuation rather than total incomprehensibility, and its subtlety explains why fluent translations can escape critical scrutiny.

Table 1. Selected culture-specific items and proposed layered solutions

Item	Cultural meaning	Problem in recorded solution	Proposed strategy
akoufi / أكوفي	Large earthen grain store	General ‘vessel/jar’ forms	Retention + concise functional gloss
karouba / الكاروبا	Kin-based quarter and social unit	‘Neighbourhood’ / ‘families’	Retention + institutional gloss
chouari / شواري	Pannier carried by a pack animal	قفة ‘basket’	Specific functional description
fouta / فوطة	Large cloth worn around the waist	‘Head covering/handkerchief’	Retain local term; describe placement
gandoura / قندورة	Specific Maghrebi garment	‘Clothing’ / ‘robe’	Established Maghrebi form + context
djema/tajma‘t / تاجماعت	Customary village assembly	Generic/modern ‘council’	Retention + مجلس القرية العرفي
amin / الأمين	Village office holder	Form-only restoration	Add institutional function
marabout / مرابط	Saint, religious specialist, or shrine	‘Sorcerer/charlatan’ variants	Context-sensitive differentiation
roumi / رومي	Historically situated outsider	‘Turk/French/Western’	Follow focalisation and period
Item	Cultural meaning	Problem in recorded solution	Proposed strategy
akoufi / أكوفي	Large earthen grain store	General ‘vessel/jar’ forms	Retention + concise functional gloss

Limitations

Several limitations delimit the claims that can be made from this study. First, the investigation is a secondary reanalysis of the 38 source-culture lexical types and 64 target-text translation events identified by Zitouni and Almutairi (2022), rather than an independently compiled concordance of the complete French and Arabic texts. The analysis is therefore contingent on the scope, item selection, segmentation, and procedural classification of the published inventory. Although selected instances were checked against the 1954 French edition, the absence of a licensed, machine-readable copy of the complete Arabic target text precluded systematic retrieval of every occurrence, the identification of unreported variants, and the calculation of frequencies for the translation as a whole. The reported percentages should consequently be read as descriptive properties of a small, purposively delimited lexical dataset, not as inferential evidence about the entire novel, the translator’s global practice, or French–Arabic literary translation more broadly.

Second, the lexical emphasis necessarily brackets forms of cultural signification that operate above and below the level of the isolated word. Proverbs, collocations, oral formulae, syntactic patterning, rhythm, narratorial explicitation, forms of address, and shifts among individual and collective voice may carry cultural and postcolonial meaning

even when they contain no readily identifiable culture-specific item. This is particularly consequential in *Le Fils du Pauvre*, where the movement between autobiographical and ethnographic registers contributes to the novel's polyphonic organisation (Porras Medrano, 2001). The present findings therefore illuminate one salient stratum of cultural transfer but do not constitute a comprehensive account of heterolingual style or narrative voice.

Third, the distinction among layered restitution, cultural attenuation, and cultural displacement involves interpretive judgement. The five proposed dimensions—referential, functional, indexical, narrative, and ethical-historical adequacy—make the evaluative basis explicit, but the study did not employ independent coders, report intercoder agreement, or submit every analysis to a panel of Kabyle and Algerian cultural specialists. Etymological evidence and dictionary meanings cannot, on their own, establish the pragmatic force or institutional resonance of a term in a particular community. Accordingly, some context-sensitive readings, especially those concerning variable items such as *marabout*, *roumi*, *taleb*, and *amin*, should be treated as analytically grounded interpretations rather than uniquely correct replacements.

Fourth, the study addresses one Arabic translation produced in a particular temporal, regional, and institutional setting. Nisrin Shukri's 2014 version was published in Cairo for an Arabic-reading public whose familiarity with Kabyle institutions and Algerian vernacular usage cannot be assumed. The analysis cannot determine whether observed generalisation, restoration, or inconsistency reflects the translator's decisions, editorial intervention, publisher norms, or expectations concerning pan-Arab readability. Nor can a single target text establish whether the cultural-return paradox characterises other Arabic versions. The existence of Jurj Salim's 1962 translation and Muhammad Ajina's Tunisian version makes this limitation especially important, because translator location and historical moment may affect recognition without guaranteeing preservation.

Finally, claims about readerly accessibility and cultural effect remain textually inferred. Arabic readership is internally heterogeneous: Kabyle bilinguals, Algerian Arabic speakers, Maghrebi readers without Kabyle, and Mashreq readers may activate different meanings from the same Arabic-script form. Because the study includes no reception experiment, interview data, translator testimony, or publishing archive, it cannot demonstrate how actual readers interpret retained terms, glosses, or apparent Arabic cognates. The proposed framework should therefore be regarded as a theoretically informed and replicable heuristic whose explanatory and predictive value still requires empirical validation.

Conclusion

Translating the cultural specificity of popular-cultural novelists requires more than lexical equivalence. In *Le Fils du Pauvre*, domestic objects, garments, foods, kin terms, religious roles, and village institutions organise the social world and carry the traces of Kabyle, Algerian Arabic, older Arabic, and French contact. Their translation determines whether Arabic readers encounter a historically situated community or a generalised rural setting.

The reanalysed corpus shows that literal translation and borrowing dominate the recorded solutions, but neither procedure guarantees cultural adequacy. Generic forms can preserve plot while attenuating social meaning; familiar Arabic roots can mask semantic drift; and erroneous substitutions can alter clothing, authority, religion, or group identity. The cultural-return paradox explains why apparent linguistic homecoming may become cultural displacement.

A defensible practice combines cultural mapping, functional prioritisation, calibrated retention, concise first-occurrence explanation, consistent terminology, expert consultation, and transparent paratext. Such a method neither fetishises foreign words

nor domesticates them automatically. It treats popular culture as a structured system of relations and the translator as responsible for how those relations are reconstituted. For Translation Studies, the French–Arabic movement of Feraoun’s novel challenges binary models of source and target culture. The source is already heterolingual and translational; the target is internally diverse rather than culturally homogeneous. Future research should build licensed parallel corpora, compare the three Arabic translations, include phraseology and proverbs, and test reader reception across Algeria, the Maghreb, and the Mashreq. The broader principle remains clear: cultural translation succeeds when it allows a literary community to become intelligible without ceasing to be historically and linguistically particular.

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