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RESEARCH ARTICLE



## Between global and local: translation and localization in Netflix Turkey's media paratexts

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### ABSTRACT

This study analyses Netflix Turkey's media paratexts in which Netflix's foreign productions and Turkish originals are promoted by the creative use of local elements and/or culture-specific references. It aims to identify the role of translation in these paratexts in promoting both Netflix and its shows such as *Stranger Things* among others in Turkey. It also discusses the functions of these paratexts in relation to their socio-political contexts of production and the wider debates around regulation and censorship in Turkey. The analysis shows that translation and localization in the selected paratexts serve to make the foreign shows relatable, evoke a sentiment of nostalgia and create a sense of belonging. Further, the paratexts on Netflix Turkish originals highlight the untranslatability and culture-specificity of Turkish expressions to appeal to the viewers' national pride, which is arguably informed by a populist approach due to the increasing possibility of restrictions on content.

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## Introduction

Netflix began its broadcasting activities in Turkey in January 2016 and was considered a game-changing player in the Turkish market (Kaptan and Algan 2020, 14). The growing popularity that the platform has since then enjoyed is arguably facilitated by its strategy to provide “a truly Turkish service” and “offer a more localised Netflix in Turkey” (Netflix 2016). Netflix Turkey's localization strategy involved publishing media paratexts derived from Netflix's official trailers and tailored for local audiences through processes of translation and adaptation. These promotional materials included trailers and billboards which relied on the use of culture-specific elements and/or local songs and celebrities to publicize shows such as *The Umbrella Academy*, *Dark*, *Black Mirror*, *Money Heist* and *Stranger Things*. As for promoting its Turkish originals, Netflix Turkey also launched an advertising campaign, which was built on emphasizing the uniqueness of idiomatic Turkish expressions and hence their untranslatability. These campaigns attracted both media attention as “expensive, high-profile initiatives” (Vitrinel and Ildır 2021) and scholarly attention in media studies (Vitrinel 2018; Ildır and Celik Rappas 2021). However, such studies concentrate on the marketing aspect of localization without discussing these materials as paratexts and providing any (para)textual analysis in relation to

their contexts of production. Further, no previous study has adopted a translation studies perspective or examined the constitutive role of translation in informing these paratexts and their potential to promote Netflix and its shows, which is a gap this study seeks to fill.

Whilst outlining the variety of approaches taken in Netflix Turkey's localization strategy through examples from *The Umbrella Academy*, *Dark* and *Money Heist*, this study will specifically focus on those regarding *Stranger Things* and the one entitled "Şimdi Onlar Altyazılı İzlesin" ("Now, they will watch it [Turkish shows] with subtitles") intended to promote Netflix's Turkish originals.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the former, the latter is not a paratext that frames a particular audiovisual text translated into Turkish but a general one that includes footage from a selection of Netflix productions made in Turkey. As for the reasons for limiting the scope of the analysis to *Stranger Things*, the show stands out from others in terms of the number of paratexts (five in total) produced to promote the second and third seasons. Additionally, the variety of these paratexts is representative of Netflix's localization strategy in reflecting its engagement with the national context. The discussion of both types of paratexts allows for identifying similarities and differences in the global brand's approach to the promotion of translated and original audiovisual content.

Drawing on the framework provided by Jonathan Gray (2010) and Kathryn Batchelor (2018), the study offers a close reading of selected paratexts to identify how Netflix defines the "local" in the context of Turkey and adapts the global content for its intended audience. It also seeks to discuss the functions of these paratexts in relation to their socio-political contexts of production and the wider debates around regulation and censorship in Turkey in which Netflix became embroiled. In doing so, this study will establish the role of translation in these paratexts in terms of localization, diegetic and extradiegetic translation and discourse of untranslatability, as delineated below. It argues that the role of translation in facilitating Netflix's popularity in Turkey is informed by a populist approach due to the increasing possibility of restrictions on content since 2016.

## Media paratexts and translation

This study is based on an extended application of Gérard Genette's (1997, 1) concept of paratext used to refer to any materials that "surround" and "extend" a text "in order to present it" and "to ensure the text's presence in the world, its 'reception' and consumption". While taking their cue from Genette's conceptualization, scholars also adapt some key aspects of his model and provide alterations to the definition and categorization of the term. One key example is Jonathan Gray's (2010) work entitled *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*, which explores the impact of paratexts on audiences' understanding of films and television programmes. In a similar manner to Genette's (1997, 2) view of paratext as a threshold, Gray (2010, 17) defines paratexts as "the greeters, gatekeepers, and cheerleaders for and of the media, filters through which we must pass on our way to 'the text itself'". However, Gray's theory of paratextuality challenges the hierarchical relationship between the text and its paratext by disregarding the role of authorial intention, pivotal in Genette's model, in defining the potential of paratextual materials to create certain interpretations of a text. The scope of paratext is thus broadened to encompass any proliferation of a film, show or programme that "constructs, lives in, and can affect the running of the text" (Gray 2010,

6). In parallel, in addition to industry-created paratexts, the audience – or viewer-created ones are considered paratexts that can add value to texts and change their meanings (143). Therefore, “the dynamic between text and paratext is much more fluid”, in Gray’s conceptualization of the term (Batchelor 2021, 123). Similar approaches which acknowledge user – or fan-created texts as paratexts can also be found in other works (Mittell 2015, 262; Batchelor 2018, 158–159).

Additionally, Genette’s emphasis on authorial function poses a problem for studies which focus on the mediating role of media paratexts in relation to translations, owing to the difficulty of identifying the various agents at work. This problem is overcome by Batchelor’s (2018, 142) functional definition of paratexts, which views paratext as “a consciously crafted threshold for a text which has the potential to influence the way (s) in which the text is received”. As in Gray’s model, this definition allows the term to encompass material produced by people who have no authorial intention or no connection to the author. The present study draws on Batchelor’s definition of paratext which replaces Genette’s criterion of authorial intention with one of conscious crafting and analyses industry-created paratexts, in Gray’s terms, to highlight the role of Netflix Turkey as the commissioner of promotional trailers. Despite the lack of a direct connection to the creators of the shows in question, Netflix Turkey acts as the local representative of the global brand in the Turkish context.

Relatedly, although Netflix Turkey’s paratexts may also be regarded as official in terms of not being audience – or viewer-created ones, it can be observed that Netflix Turkey itself avoids labelling these paratexts as official and promotes them with different titles on social media. For instance, Netflix Turkey’s YouTube channel published the original trailer of *The Umbrella Academy*’s first season as the official one and the localized version as “The Umbrella Academy| The Chaos Class Trailer.” Hence, “official” and “local” paratexts will be used in this study to distinguish between Netflix’s original trailers and Netflix Turkey’s localized trailers, respectively.

Gray (2010) also divides media paratexts into two groups depending on whether they are published before, during or after the release of a show or film. Accordingly, “entryway paratexts” are introduced to the viewer “before he or she reaches the text and try to control the viewer’s entrance to the text” (20). On the other hand, “in medias res paratexts” are intended to “flow between the gaps of textual exhibition, or that come to us ‘during’ or ‘after’ viewing, working to police certain reading strategies in medias res” (23). This categorization will also be considered in the analysis of Netflix Turkey’s local paratexts, as it will help differentiate between the paratexts depending on whether they (re)frame new or old translated content.

Another consideration for the present study will be the effect of Netflix’s identity as a global brand on the reception of paratexts and hence their role “in reframing or repackaging a given audiovisual product for a specific target culture and possibly in creating new meanings and expectations” (Bucaria 2014, 294). In her study of two US series, *Breaking Bad* and *Glee*, broadcast on Italian television, Chiara Bucaria (2014, 306) suggests that the channel that airs the series also constitutes a paratext as “the brand identity of the channel influences viewers’ perceptions of the show even before they view it”. This influence can arguably be extended to the reception of promotional paratexts produced by global streaming platforms across different contexts. For instance, the positive or negative perception of Netflix in a particular context may also influence the reception of paratexts

released to publicize a foreign show, and vice versa, since it is at the receiving end of both praise and criticism for these proliferations. The interplay between a brand's (real or perceived) identity and reception of its paratexts is hence relevant to the discussion of Netflix Turkey's paratexts here.

Batchelor (2018, 39) also underscores the potential of paratext as a conceptual framework for context-oriented research. Accordingly, a study of paratexts with a focus on the interrelation between ideology and society can offer insights into how a dominant ideology or competition between different ideologies in a given context manifests itself in paratextual material and may thus be linked to wider debates of translation and censorship (35). This potential pertains to the investigation into Netflix's localization strategy in the Turkish context through an analysis of paratexts which are both informed by and reflect their political context of production marked by increased control and censorship over digital content. Localization here refers to "any kind of *media adaptation*, such as format licensing, adaptations, transcreations and remakes – in fact, all types of translation understood in the broadest sense of the concept" (Chaume 2020, 320, emphasis in original). Given that localization stands at the core of Netflix's success in various markets, this study will provide insight into Netflix's understanding of "the local" in the Turkish context by exploring the functions of local paratexts in (re)framing original and translated content.

In doing so, the analysis will focus on establishing the role of translation in these paratexts in three respects. First, translation is considered on a textual level in the broad sense of localization "in which translated text is adapted to the local, socio-cultural norms of the target culture" (House 2017, 183). In this respect, a comparison between official and local paratexts will allow for identifying the points of "cultural filtering" (136), which reveals the omissions and additions involved in the process of localization. Second, the study will note the multilingual character of some local paratexts and discuss the role of translation in these on a diegetic and extra-diegetic level. Here, diegetic translation is used to refer to "any act of (oral) interpreting which takes place within the story world through the agency of a character in the narrative" (O'Sullivan 2010, 80). This aspect will particularly be discussed in relation to a paratext where a fictitious interview takes place between a Turkish TV personality and an actor from *Stranger Things*. Unlike diegetic translation, extra-diegetic ones such as subtitling, dubbing and voiceover are "extraneous to the narrative but are necessary if the audience is to understand what is going on" (Cronin 2009, 116). Both forms of translation will be considered in terms of their functions in multilingual paratexts.

The third aspect in which the role of translation is discussed in this study concerns the discourse of untranslatability in local paratexts that rely on the deliberate use of Turkish idioms and metaphors in promoting Netflix's foreign and Turkish originals. Untranslatability, a perennial topic of debate in translation studies, has taken on different meanings depending on whether it is defined from a linguistic, cultural or philosophical perspective. For instance, from a linguistic standpoint, the term may denote "the lack of equivalent terminology or structures between two languages" (Mundt 2019, 65). However, a culture-oriented perspective may present untranslatability as a way of "granting a peculiar, unassimilable otherness to the culture that the foreign language represents" (Large et al. 2019, 2). In this respect, it will be important to identify how local paratexts engage with the discourse of untranslatability and discuss its role in Netflix's localization strategy in Turkey.

## Netflix in the Turkish market and Netflix Turkey

Netflix's entry into the local market in 2016 was "low-key" (Vitrinel 2018), with a limited catalogue and local content as well as a lack of target-oriented promotional campaigns in the early days of its business in Turkey. Nevertheless, Netflix benefited from a void – albeit brief – in the local market at the time of its launch, due to the lack of any streaming video-on-demand (SVOD) platforms. Local SVOD platforms such as Blu TV and puhutv entered the market in 2017 with competitive prices and the upper hand of being already familiar with local expectations (Yanardağoğlu and Turhallı 2020, 191). This development arguably prompted Netflix to increase its efforts to make the platform more relatable and appeal to the target audience both through local content and promotional material. For instance, on 29 May 2017, the anniversary of the conquest of Constantinople by Sultan Mehmed II of the Ottoman Empire, Netflix announced the launch of its first Turkish original series entitled *The Protector* to be released in 2018, presenting it as "a hero-driven action story" woven "with Ottoman and Turkish legend and history" (Netflix 2017).

Additionally, Netflix Turkey began to publicize its productions through local advertising campaigns, which was in line with Netflix's prioritization of service that "is not just about translation" but "an experience that feels local" in its job adverts ("Localization Project Manager – Product" n.d.). By 2019, Netflix was serving 1.5 million subscribers in Turkey and reached about 10% of the country's broadband households (Kucukgocmen and Li 2019). Netflix Turkey's YouTube channel currently has over one million subscribers.<sup>2</sup> As a transnational company, Netflix had not initially been affected by national regulations binding for traditional broadcast television. However, this situation later changed in parallel to the increase in the number of these platforms and their subscribers. Therefore, it can be suggested that, while Netflix's appeal to local taste increased its popularity, it also brought about unwanted attention from the official authorities.

A law on the supervision of content on digital platforms was passed in 2018, requiring international platforms such as Netflix to obtain a government licence and open an office in Turkey (Soylu 2019). Accordingly, the licence enabled Turkey's radio and TV watchdog, the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), to both "censor streaming sites like Netflix and demand personal information about customers" (Soylu 2019). The law, which came into effect in 2019, raised questions on whether Netflix would withdraw from the Turkish market as it was interpreted as the government's attempt to control Netflix content (Lindahl 2020). However, Netflix decided to comply with the new rules and obtained its licence, along with Amazon Prime Video in 2020 (Easton 2020).

In parallel, Netflix accommodated demands from the ruling power such as omitting certain foreign shows from its catalogue and cancelling a Turkish project with a gay character. Censorship over content also manifested itself in the decision to publish adapted versions of global media paratexts such as the trailers of *El Camino* and *Sex Education* (Marshall 2019). Accordingly, the platform removed the cigarette butt of Jesse Pinkman in the former and blurred the middle finger that Maeve Wiley shows in the latter (Özsefil 2019).<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, this reconciliatory approach did not save Netflix from becoming the target of lashing out on the part of the ruling power and its representatives several times since its launch in Turkey in 2016. For instance, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan aimed at Netflix and YouTube in 2020, referring to them as

“immoral” outlets that “do not suit the Turkish nation” (Pitel 2022). Despite this, Netflix continued to ramp up its investment in Turkey and opened an office in Istanbul in the second half of 2021 as proof of its ongoing commitment to the country. This context arguably informed the platform’s localization strategy not only in terms of the form and content of Netflix Turkey’s paratexts but also their reception and role in framing foreign and local audiovisual content, as is shown in the following section.

### Netflix Turkey’s paratexts

Based on Gray’s (2010, 143) distinction between paratexts based on their commissioner and/or creator, Netflix Turkey’s trailers can be described as industry-created paratexts that served to both publicize Netflix’s productions and increase the platform’s appeal at a local level. With regard to the role of translation in these paratexts, this section delineates three strategies that can be considered examples of translation in the broad sense of localization. The first strategy identified in these paratexts involves the juxtaposition of the local and global by featuring a local soundtrack to introduce a foreign show in the target context. An illustrative example is the one released to promote the first season’s premiere of *The Umbrella Academy* in Turkey.<sup>4</sup> The two-minute-long original trailer introduces the story and main characters by also incorporating two intertitles.<sup>5</sup> One of them informs viewers that the series is “based on the hit comic book series created by Gerard Way and Gabriel Bá”. As for the other intertitle, the proverb “When It Rains, It Pours” appears word for word on a black background, interspersed with action-packed scenes. Here, the trailer also features a punk rock version of “A Hazy Shade of Winter” covered for Netflix by Gerard Way.

Drawing on this official trailer, Netflix Turkey’s one-minute-long paratext, entitled “The Umbrella Academy| The Chaos Class Trailer”, renders the original footage and song inaudible by using the popular soundtrack of a classic Turkish comedy film *The Chaos Class*. To highlight the intended link between the global and local, it also replaces the intertitles in English with Turkish ones such as “a super extraordinary academy”, “a super extraordinary headteacher” and “super extraordinary students”. Evoking the use of nicknames such as “handsome” and “nerdy” in *The Chaos Class*, the paratext aligns these intertitles with the relevant images from the official trailer to introduce the show’s main characters through such qualifiers as “strong”, “famous” or “old”.

Gray (2010) notes that each paratext “holds the potential to change the meaning of the text” (2). This potential may involve “either amplifying an aspect of the text through its mass circulation or adding something new and different to the text” (2). Arguably, Gray’s point is doubly at work in the case of Netflix Turkey’s paratexts that frame translated audiovisual content, especially when they are “entryway” paratexts. The localized version draws a parallelism between the superheroes of the American series and rebel students of this Turkish film by amplifying one commonality between the two, based on the presence of a teacher-student relation. It thus invites viewers to interpret the foreign as a different version of a local and familiar story. However, this interpretation relies on the mediation of the show as “more mainstream, less niche or fannish” (17) as it helps to de-emphasize the show’s unique aspects such as the threat of the apocalypse and queer representation. Thus, the localized paratext attempts to increase the show’s

appeal by denuding the original story of its complexities until the viewers' first real encounter with the whole content via Netflix.

The second strategy used in the production of these paratexts is to feature a local celebrity in a manner that forges a link between the show's plot and the celebrity's image and popularity in the local context. Unlike the previous example, this type of paratext does not incorporate any footage from the show but rather invents a local story that takes its cue from the show and draws on its themes and traits such as location, costume, and soundtrack. For instance, Netflix Turkey published an "in medias res" paratext in July 2019, following *Dark*'s second season premiere, where Erol Evgin, a notable Turkish singer, wanders around the locations similar to those in Winden, the town where the story is set in *Dark*.<sup>6</sup> In this video, entitled "DARK | Time Travel in Turkey | Netflix", Evgin is seen sporting a yellow coat like young Jonas in the show, walking through the caves in Winden and opening the gate to travel across time. Being accompanied in the background by the show's original soundtrack evocative of suspense and mystery, Evgin finds a cassette of his classic hit "İşte Öyle Bir Şey" ("Something of the Like"), released in 1976, and finally meets a younger version of himself. Referring to the 33-year cycle on which time travels are based in the Netflix series, the young Erol asks the old one sitting next to him on a bench: "For how long have we been doing this? For 33 years?" Drawing on the theme of time travel, this paratext offers an adapted version of a scene with young and middle-aged Jonas in *Dark*, as seen in [Figure 1](#). Netflix Turkey thus both sparks the interest of prospective viewers and establishes a new frame for existing ones to reconnect with the show.

Unlike the one with *The Umbrella Academy*, this paratext does not serve as a "threshold", in Genette's words (1997, 2), that prepares viewers for the show since *Dark* was already enjoying a great deal of popularity in Turkey at the time of the video's release. Instead, it testifies to Netflix's commitment to the goal of increasing the appeal of the streaming platform that pays particular attention to the local culture. This is particularly the case since the reliance on the use of culture-specific references in both paratexts requires familiarity with and knowledge of the Turkish popular culture on the part of viewers as "texts make sense because of our past textual experiences, literacy and knowledge" (Gray 2010, 31). Additionally, the selection of celebrities



**Figure 1.** The localized version of the scene with young and adult Jonas in *Dark*.

and songs in these paratexts suggests that Netflix Turkey seeks to evoke a nostalgic sentiment in their viewers while adding a local taste to the foreign content.

Viewers can be seen to share their reactions to these localization strategies and discuss the creative aspects of these paratexts through their comments and questions on Netflix Turkey's YouTube channel. For instance, while some viewers state that they were touched by the use of *The Chaos Class* soundtrack in promoting a Netflix show, others praise the platform for the creativity and quality of the paratext with Evgin by contrasting it with slapdash Turkish dramas on television. Some viewers offer alternative celebrities to be featured in this trailer or explain the link between *Dark* and Evgin with a reference to the latter's ever-youthful appearance and songs standing the test of time. Also, some comments reveal that the video inspires viewers to be creative and comment on the year to which they would travel to achieve a certain goal. Therefore, in addition to their marketing function, these "interactive paratexts" (Batchelor 2018, 53) invite a collective effort to comment on the links between the local and global, and thus facilitate a sense of community-building among their viewers as current or prospective Netflix subscribers.

Unlike these examples which attracted positive attention as part of Netflix's creative advertising campaigns, the third strategy used in the production of promotional paratexts rather caused a political controversy due to its recontextualisation of a foreign show's trademark in the local context. The specific example concerns the local trailer released on 7 April 2018 to promote the second season of *Money Heist*, which some commentators interpreted as an implicit call for provocation and chaos in Turkey (Bock 2018).<sup>7</sup> The paratext starts with a scene in which an individual wearing a red jumpsuit and a Dali mask like the characters of the show is seen drinking tea in the Grand Bazaar of Istanbul. This scene cuts to a CCTV camera in the corner of a street as the police siren begins to be heard at the same time when the *Ciao Bella* song, the show's original soundtrack, plays in the background. The clip then shows various people watching *Money Heist* across different parts of the city via different devices, such as on a laptop while drinking Turkish tea in a café, through a shop window in a TV store, or via their mobiles while crossing the Bosphorus on a boat. The number of those in red jumpsuits and Dali masks increases in these crowds as they finally meet at the centre of Kadıköy, a secular and liberal neighbourhood of Istanbul.

While viewers on YouTube praised Netflix for paying special attention to the Turkish market and recognizing the show's popularity among Turkish viewers, some pro-government journalists and politicians attacked the video as propaganda and blamed Netflix for paving the way for a coup to topple the government (Bock 2018). In an interview, Netflix CEO Reed Hastings responded with laughter to these claims, calling them a conspiracy theory and saying that they have no such intention to plot a rebellion (Özkök 2018). Despite being dismissed as frivolous, these comments point to the context-bound character of this media paratext as being a reminder of a precarious context at the time of the video's release such as the aftereffects of the failed coup in July 2016 and the consequent state of emergency that was still in effect. On the other hand, this scepticism resonates with the official perception of Netflix as being corrosive of the values of the Turkish nation, which arguably encouraged such interpretations of the show and its paratext in the first place. Therefore, this example testifies to the dominating influence of Netflix's brand identity as a paratext over the reception of its promotional paratext produced to publicize a foreign show. Overall, these strategies highlight that the theme and

plot of a foreign show define the form and content of translation in the sense of localization in local paratexts. The media paratexts on *Stranger Things* also implement some of these strategies in addition to others, as shown below.

### *Stranger Things and its local paratexts*

Netflix Turkey published five paratexts in total – three and two for the second and third seasons, respectively – to promote *Stranger Things* in Turkey. Except for the first one, all the others feature Sadettin Teksoy, an idiosyncratic investigative journalist who is occasionally referred to as a television legend in Turkey. Teksoy had his heyday on broadcast television in 1990s Turkey as a presenter and producer of *Teksoy on Duty* where he covered incidents such as disappearances and extra-terrestrial beings and gained popularity for solving mysteries and hunting monsters. Copywriters who worked in Netflix Turkey’s localization projects note that Netflix wanted to “build up a local campaign in Turkey” to promote *Stranger Things* in particular (Bayhaner n.d.). Accordingly, the show contains many culture-specific references representative of the source context that the Turkish audience may not be familiar with such as Eggo Waffles, BMX bikes and walkie-talkies. To this can be added a temporal gap, especially for young viewers who did not experience the 1980s. Therefore, to overcome these challenges, the creative team decided to focus on the core element of the show, the monster, to build a narrative in which Teksoy can help make sense of the foreign and unrelatable for the local audience in a humorous manner.

Netflix Turkey announced *Stranger Things 2* on 27 October 2017 with an “entryway” local paratext that draws on both the first and second season’s official trailers.<sup>8</sup> Serving as a recap of the previous season’s highlights, the video features a Turkish song entitled “Dönence” (“The Tropic”) by Barış Manço, a significant figure in Turkish music history, as in the one on *The Umbrella Academy*. Like the American show, set in the 1980s and described as an ode to the given decade, the selected song was released in 1981 and hence brings out the feel of the 1980s in its listeners. Therefore, the paratext seeks to replicate the effect of the main text on its immediate audience by evoking a nostalgic sentiment in the local audiences. Additionally, given the significance of songs and theme soundtrack to the plot of the show in question as part of its musical code (Chaume 2016, 77), this song choice can be seen as an example of translation in the broad sense of localization. It not only replaces the show’s soundtrack but also renders inaudible “Thriller” by Michael Jackson in the official trailer.

The song’s intro begins with a spoken recitation by Manço in a spooky whisper voice, saying: “The day has already turned around here / And I’m waiting all alone in the bosom of the pitch-black night/ I hear it/ I see it/ One day the tropic will come/ I know it.” The match between the show’s horror genre and the dark feel of the song is amplified by the echo effect that follows the lines such as “I hear it”, “I see it” and “I know it”. In introducing the trailer, Netflix Turkey also draws on these lyrics as follows: “I hear it. I know it. I see it. The world turns upside down. Wait for October 27th. I come. #StrangerThings”. This description is, in fact, an adapted version of the line (“The world has turned Upside Down”) that originally appears on Netflix’s global social media accounts to announce the upcoming season.<sup>9</sup> Netflix Turkey recontextualises this line in a manner that rhymes with the Turkish song’s lyrics. In doing so, it overlooks capitalizing the Upside Down at the

expense of the pun in the source example that refers to the alternate dimension of Hawkins in *Stranger Things*.

To accentuate the overlap between the song's theme and the *Stranger Things* world, editing is used in the local paratext in a manner that aligns the lyrics in the intro with specific moments from the show. For instance, the video opens with a scene from the second season's trailer in which Will experiences a brief vision of the Upside Down in the Palace Arcade while hanging out with his friends. The first line "The day has already turned around here" is heard in parallel to the moment when he is transported to the Upside-Down version of the arcade. On the other hand, the second line "waiting all alone in the bosom of the pitch-black night" is aligned with the scene from the first season's trailer where Eleven stands alone amid a black space during her telepathic search for Will in the Upside Down.

Further, a comparison between the official and local paratexts reveals the role of translation in the sense of localization in the latter in toning down the culture-specific elements representative of the show's US origin. For instance, Halloween constitutes a significant reference point in the official trailer in two respects. First, an intertitle announces the release of the new season on Halloween in the USA. Second, the trailer includes scenes from Halloween when the second season picks up in Hawkins in October 1984. In addition to de-emphasizing the references to the celebrations, the local paratext only retains the Netflix logo as the intertitle and omits others on Halloween. The decision to use "cultural filtering" (House 2017, 136) here arguably reflects Netflix Turkey's view of Halloween as a tradition that may be questioned for its relevance and applicability for a wider audience in the Turkish context.

As for the paratexts with Teksoy, they can be distinguished from other examples in many respects. First, they are intertextual in terms of containing a "reference to another text genre, either through verbatim or modified quotation or through the adoption of the stylistic conventions of that genre" (Torresi 2010, 124). Teksoy himself participates in parodying his classic show and TV persona by recontextualising his idiosyncratic hand gestures and lines to explain his mission in Hawkins. For instance, the first trailer with Teksoy, which is an "in medias res" paratext released on the second season's premiere and entitled "Sadettin Teksoy in Hawkins", uses the classic intro of Teksoy's reality show with the *Stranger Things* theme soundtrack. This trailer also presents Teksoy's name in the font and colour of the famous *Stranger Things* title, zooming in on "Teksoy in Hawkins" like each chapter of the show, as shown in Figure 2. This three-minute-long paratext pretends to be a sneak preview of a special edition of *Teksoy on Duty* where Teksoy sets out on a journey to solve the mysterious incidents that took place in Hawkins. Speaking to the camera, Teksoy summarizes the plot in his style in Turkish, asking questions such as: "Where did the kids in Hawkins disappear? Who lives in the Upside Down?" While reminding viewers of what previously happened in Hawkins, Teksoy also serves as a mediator who interprets the complex story of *Stranger Things* into a plot that sounds appealing and funny to the local audience.

Similarly, the second distinguishing aspect of these paratexts is the recontextualisation of Teksoy in the fictional world of *Stranger Things* and his re-enactment of original scenes in a manner that blurs the boundaries between the real and fictional as his journey represents both a temporal and spatial one. For instance, the first paratext opens with a subtitled scene from the show's first season where Will's friends come



**Figure 2.** Sadettin Teksoy is at Hawkins.

across Eleven in the forest on a rainy evening while searching for Will with torches in their hands in the aftermath of his disappearance. In the localized version, Teksoy sporting his famous yellow raincoat replaces Eleven in this scene to create an effect as if he directly addresses the kids with his index finger and introduces himself with his popular remark in Turkish: “I am Sadettin Teksoy!” Further, these paratexts use a voice-over in which a narrator introduces Teksoy and explains his course of action to the audience. Ira Torresi (2010, 124) notes the importance for an intertextual reference in a promotional text to be “easily decoded by the target readership, or the ad will appear pedantic or just strange”. Given that Teksoy is not currently on TV and may not be immediately known to young generations, this narration also helps viewers to decode the paratext by familiarizing them with this television figure from the 1990s.

Likewise, the “entryway” paratext released before the third season’s premiere includes Teksoy’s re-enactment of a key scene from the second season’s finale where Will coughs up a slug in the sink and finds himself in the Upside-Down version of his house’s bathroom. Teksoy’s replacement of Will is intended to pick up where the previous paratext left off and thus represents a continuation of the former’s investigative journey into the Upside Down. Netflix Turkey’s localization strategy thus creates a series of “continuing paratexts” (Gray 2010, 11) that forms a narrative and exists in parallel to the story in the fictional world of *Stranger Things* to maintain the viewers’ curiosity.

The third aspect of the paratexts with Teksoy is their multilingual character in terms of incorporating both Turkish and English dialogues subtitled into Turkish. For instance, in the first one, Teksoy is stopped at the barbed gate of the Hawkins National Laboratory and warned by an officer in English: “Don’t move, stay there.” To this, Teksoy responds with a megaphone: “I am Sadettin Teksoy. Open the door” [uttered in English and subtitled into Turkish]. Later, Teksoy is seen in Will’s room, attempting to communicate with Eleven by using Will’s walkie-talkie: “Eleven, Eleven, can you hear me? Break, break [uttered in English]. Interesting.” These examples of multilingualism rather have an “audio-postcarding” function (Wahl 2008, 336), which involves incorporating English “as ornament, to mark location or nationality” (O’Sullivan 2021, 84) and “sprinkling a movie here and there with words in the language of the place where it is set” (Chiaro 2019, 113).

On the other hand, multilingualism plays a more significant role in the third local paratext of *Stranger Things 2*, which is a follow-up to the journalist's journey to Hawkins, in framing the foreign through the lens of the local.<sup>10</sup> Here, Teksoy interviews Will Byers (played by Noah Schnapp) about his disappearance in Season One by playing on the idea of blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality. Teksoy opens the video by introducing Will to the audience in Turkish with a focus on the latter's first-hand experience of *Upside Down*. He then introduces himself in English, followed by a handshake. Teksoy takes on the role of a diegetic interpreter in the video and translates Will's words into Turkish although extra-diegetic translation is provided in the form of subtitles for viewers to follow the conversation. As seen in [Table 1](#), a lack of understanding between Will and Teksoy is thus made manifest through Teksoy's misinterpretation of Schnapp's response to a question related to the fictional world of *Stranger Things*. Crucially, Teksoy's use of an idiomatic phrase such as *arafta kalmak* (which translates as "being in limbo") in (mis)translating the line "that's not real" presents itself as a parodic version of free adaptation which elicits humour by exploiting the double meaning of the idiom as referring to a state of dilemma and of being stuck between two places.

Similarly, the fourth aspect of the paratexts with Teksoy is the prevalent use of idiomatic expressions, which do not lend themselves to straightforward translations. Some of these phrases include *sakata gelmek* ("be doomed"), *in cin top oynamak* ("not a soul in sight"), *burun buruna gelmek* ("come within the whisker of something"), *pisi pisine gitmek* ("die in vain"), *tazı gibi hızlı* ("like a bat out of hell") among others. In outlining the challenges of translating promotional texts that contain intertextual references, Ira Torresi (2010) includes the use of proverbs in advertising in that category. She defines them as "texts in their own right that have the advantage of being immediately recognizable as something familiar by virtually all native speakers of a given language" (124). Despite not necessarily being examples of intertextuality, idioms are similar to proverbs in terms of their culture-specificity which conveys a sense of familiarity in speakers of the language involved. Given the promotional function of Netflix Turkey's paratexts, the idiomatic use of language is arguably a deliberate marketing strategy that acts as a domesticating translation to render the foreign audiovisual content recognizable.

**Table 1.** The paratext entitled "Things are getting weirder. Sadettin Teksoy asks questions and thinks Will answers them."

Transcription of the original video	English translation of its Turkish parts
ST (to Will): Hi, I'm Sadettin Teksoy. It's nice to meet you. Will: Nice to meet you, too.	
ST (to Will): Are you going back to the Upside Down? Will: That's not real. What are you talking about?	
ST (to the camera in Turkish): <i>Arafta kaldım diyor, sevgili seyirciler.</i> (To Will) Okay, tell me. Where is the exit? Will: Guy, what is going on? It is real?	"He says he is in limbo, dear viewers."
ST (to the camera in Turkish): <i>Hatırlamıyorum, diyor.</i> (To Will) Anyway, nice to meet you.	"He says he cannot remember it."
ST (to the camera, in Turkish): <i>Sevgili seyirciler, kendimiz çıkışı bulmak zorundayız anlaşılan. Gel kameraman kardeşim, iş başa düştü.</i> Will: Okay, nice to meet you. Bye.	"Dear viewers, it seems that we will need to find our way to the exit without any help. Let's go, cameraman brother, we got to do it ourselves."

In parallel, it seems desirable for any “outsider” viewers unfamiliar with the Turkish language and culture to feel lost in translation if they ever watch these paratexts. This would arguably help Netflix Turkey not only make the local audience feel special but also counteract the comments based on the treatment of Netflix as a potentially unreliable outsider in the Turkish context. In this respect, on the one hand, intertextuality and multilingualism emphasize the role of translation in the paratexts with Teksoy on a diegetic and extra-diegetic level, thus serving as a complement to localization on the textual level. On the other hand, the strategy to highlight idioms can be interpreted as a tacit engagement with a discourse that questions the possibility of translation given the incommensurability of differences between languages and cultures. The multilingual paratext designed to promote Netflix’s Turkish originals illustrates an explicit engagement with the discourse of untranslatability, as shown below.

### **Promotion of Turkish originals: “now, they will watch it with subtitles!”**

In addition to the production of local trailers for its foreign shows, Netflix Turkey launched an advertising campaign which involved the use of billboards and promo videos to promote its Turkish originals. Initially, these paratexts that appeared in cities throughout Turkey as part of an open-air ad campaign attracted attention with its slogan “Now, they will watch it [Turkish shows] with subtitles” with the additional info “Turkish shows and films now in 190 countries at the same time”. The local streaming platform BluTV’s CEO, Aydın Doğan Yalçındağ, reacted to Netflix’s slogan for misleading viewers, stressing that the export of Turkish films and shows to other contexts started long before Netflix (KRT TV 2020).

This slogan later appeared as the title of a trailer that was published on the social media accounts of Netflix Turkey.<sup>11</sup> Drawing on the footage of selected Netflix Turkish originals, the video features a male voiceover who explains why translation is doomed to fail to convey the unique expressions of Turkish, as shown in Table 2. The text also contains English expressions such as “Good morning”, “heart”, “feel” and “soul” to be contrasted with and presented as inferior to its Turkish equivalents. As in the paratexts with Teksoy, this paratext is marked by the deliberate selection of idioms and metaphors that do not lend themselves to straightforward translations. In this

**Table 2.** “Now, they will watch it with subtitles.”

<p>“Good morning” is a nice phrase, but can it replace “<i>günaydın</i>” (1)? How can you treat “get well soon” and “<i>geçmiş olsun</i>” (2) as equals? “Heart”, “soul” and “feeling” are all fine, but can they move one’s heart as “<i>gönül</i>” (3)? Try and translate “<i>güle güle oturun</i>” (4) if you can. Or translate “<i>vidı vidı etme</i>” (5), “<i>topla gel</i>” (6), “<i>ölümü gör</i>” (7), “<i>sağlık olsun</i>” (8), “<i>hamdolsun</i>” (9), “<i>eyvallah</i>” (10). Some phrases are unique to us. You cannot translate them but may only give a sense of them. Well, then, now they will watch [it] with subtitles. A scene from <i>Ethos</i>: “You somehow lead the conversation to where you want it to go.”</p>	<p>(1) translates as “a day full of light” or “the day is bright” (2) “May the illness pass quickly” (3) used in Turkish to convey the metaphorical sense of “heart” (4) “May you live happily in your new house” (5) “Stop nagging” (6) “Straighten up and drive” (7) translates as “see my death”, used when someone tries to persuade someone to accept or do something (8) translates as “may there be health”, used to comfort someone after a challenge or a minor failure to remind them that health is the most important thing (9) translates “I praise God”, used to convey gratitude and appreciation (10) translates as “I thank God first”, used to thank someone</p>
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respect, the use of these expressions with an emphasis on their untranslatability serves as an acknowledgement of “the irreducibility of cultural difference” (Large et al. 2019, 2). Therefore, translation on a discursive level bears a political tone here as the paratext hails untranslatability as a way of resisting the global domination of English.

While suggesting that Netflix Turkish originals offer an opportunity to challenge the status of English as a lingua franca, the paratext adopts a strategy that appeals to the national pride of Turkish-speaking viewers. The promotion of an “us vs them” narrative coupled with the implied superiority of one language over another received criticisms from viewers for bordering on racist and nationalist discourse (Önder 2020). On the one hand, this narrative can be seen as the continuation of Netflix’s counterbalancing efforts against the attacks from various parties, including official and conservative outlets. On the other hand, the critical reception of the slogan also suggests that these efforts were not necessarily welcome by those who supported the platform in the face of control over their content. In that respect, it can be argued that Netflix’s localization strategy takes a populist turn with this paratext as it is intended to promote the brand rather than Turkish shows, thereby striving to alter the “outsider” image of the platform as “one of you”.

## Conclusion

This article analysed the selected paratexts regarding Netflix’s foreign and Turkish shows in terms of their functions in creating new meanings and local interpretations for the audience in view of their contexts of production. In doing so, it established the role of translation in these texts in three interrelated respects: a) translation in the broad sense of localization; b) diegetic and extra-diegetic translation in multilingual paratexts; c) translation on a discursive level. Accordingly, translation in the sense of localization enabled these paratexts to frame Netflix and its foreign shows as relatable and familiar by evoking a sentiment of nostalgia in the target audience. In promoting the foreign through the lens of the local, the use of cultural filtering thus increased Netflix’s popularity and attracted new subscribers to the platform. Netflix’s use of localization was also acknowledged by subscribers and fans as a testament to the platform’s dedication to the Turkish market. This in turn enabled them to develop a sense of belonging to the brand through their comments and interactions on its social media accounts such as Netflix Turkey’s YouTube channel.

Additionally, multilingualism allowed for rendering the role of translation more visible in these paratexts on diegetic, extra-diegetic and discursive levels. For instance, diegetic interpreting in the paratext with Teksoy and Schnapp elicited humour through the former’s mistranslation, which was itself based on localization as he used an idiomatic phrase that was difficult to translate. In parallel, the multilingual paratext used in the promotion of Turkish originals highlighted the superiority of Turkish as opposed to English to appeal to the national pride of its viewers in their language. Unlike other local paratexts where Turkish popular culture (songs, films, singers) emerged as the main reference point for Netflix to define its understanding of “the local” in Turkey, these paratexts directly or indirectly emphasized the need for knowledge of Turkish. Whilst complementing the creation of a localized Netflix, this celebration of untranslatability as a form of resistance against globalization and English contradicted

the identity of Netflix as a global brand. However, the use of translation on a discursive level in Netflix Turkey's local paratexts was also arguably informed by the challenges that the global company faced in political and legislative ways. The populist discourse on the untranslatability of culture-specific Turkish expressions can hence be seen as an attempt to invalidate any claims that might be made about corroding local values or pursuing ulterior motives to destabilize the country.

In addition, the form and content of translation in the selected media paratexts provide clues about the target audience of Netflix Turkey's localization strategy. For instance, despite their overall recognition and fame in the Turkish context, the celebrities appearing in these trailers had their peak moments in their careers in the 1990s when there were no streaming platforms. Just like these figures are identified with a period before Netflix under the monopoly of traditional broadcast television, Turkish songs selected as the soundtrack of foreign shows are old classic ones rather than recent hits, and hence may not be easily recognizable for young generations. Netflix Turkey's decision to feature these local celebrities and songs can be attributed to three interrelated motives. First, these choices suggest that local paratexts aim to herald a new era by transferring what was once popular on traditional broadcast television to the digital world. Second, it can be inferred that Netflix aims to represent an alternative to those who may feel disenchanting with broadcast television in the Turkish market, as also noted in some viewers' comments on YouTube. Finally, Netflix's decision to highlight the local through the evocation of nostalgic sentiment may be interpreted as an attempt to reach older audiences who may need more persuasion to adapt their media consumption habits and adopt Netflix as a viable option. Therefore, in addition to their functions to orient the local viewers' understanding and expectation of a Netflix show, these paratexts also reveal a desire on the part of the platform to bring the "old" and "new" together while establishing a local frame for the foreign audio-visual content. Future research may involve a comprehensive analysis of viewers' comments on Netflix Turkey's YouTube channel to establish the reception of these media paratexts and their functions in the target culture.

## Notes

1. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.
2. <https://www.youtube.com/c/NetflixT%C3%BCrkiyeOfficial>
3. Netflix Turkey's own version of *El Camino*'s trailer can be accessed here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=514hqNH3XDA&ab\\_channel=NetflixT%C3%BCrkiye](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=514hqNH3XDA&ab_channel=NetflixT%C3%BCrkiye). See Özsefil 2019 for Netflix Turkey's censorship of the official trailer at <https://filmloverss.com/citizen-kane-neden-bu-kadar-guzel/>
4. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fh0ovAKtVSw&ab\\_channel=NetflixT%C3%BCrkiye](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fh0ovAKtVSw&ab_channel=NetflixT%C3%BCrkiye)
5. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DAmWHxEOkKw&t=1s&ab\\_channel=Netflix](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DAmWHxEOkKw&t=1s&ab_channel=Netflix)
6. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNwL4Cgr1uE&ab\\_channel=NetflixT%C3%BCrkiye](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNwL4Cgr1uE&ab_channel=NetflixT%C3%BCrkiye)
7. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0T1F6YM1Oew&ab\\_channel=NetflixT%C3%BCrkiye](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0T1F6YM1Oew&ab_channel=NetflixT%C3%BCrkiye)
8. <https://twitter.com/netflixturkiye/status/922471523964698624>.
9. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1ZXOOLMJ8s>
10. <https://twitter.com/netflixturkiye/status/925738693289299970>.
11. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-D5J4l6R4sg&ab\\_channel=NetflixT%C3%BCrkiye](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-D5J4l6R4sg&ab_channel=NetflixT%C3%BCrkiye)

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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