



## Article

# Cultural Perspectives in English Translation: The *Story of Crow and Snake From Panchatantra*

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## ABSTRACT

The problem is that although the culture and language are blended, the linguistic elements sometimes roughly demonstrate cultural dimensions in translated products. In other words, a cultural translation usually demands an understanding of linguistic i.e. culturally bound terms and expressions as well as extra-linguistic elements including cultural ones. Since literature is a nation's cultural resource, the issue becomes even more complicated when literary translation is being involved. To our knowledge, there is no original *Panchatantra* left in India and all we have today are translations in different languages. To this end, the Persian version has always been considered the source text since the book was first translated into Persian in 550 CE. Therefore, the English translation of the story *Crow and Snake* is selected from *Panchatantra* as the target text and investigated employing Bassnett and Lefevere's (1992) Cultural Theory with a focus on interpretive Discourse Analysis (DA) as analytical frameworks. The Persian text is the translation of Monshi, reprinted in 2010 and the English translation was done by Ryder in 1925. The findings reveal that the relationship between language and culture still remains complicated, and yet the lack of cultural understanding among the translators leads to violation and distortion of the intended messages and meanings embedded in source texts. It is quite safe then to say that the lack of cultural knowledge highly influences the translation

## I. INTRODUCTION

The *Panchatantra*, due to the unique characteristics of fiction and education, has a great reputation, not only in the literature of greater Persia but in the history of world literature. Ryder (1925) claims that these stories are among the most widely known in the world. In the same vein, Amitav Ghosh (1994) maintains that *Panchatantra* is reckoned by some to be second only to the Bible in the extent of its global diffusion. Despite the wide celebrity of the work, it is obvious that any culture treats the work based on its cultural characteristics, and the translator in one way or another violates the message to make it fit and be understandable for the receiving culture. Thus, translation could be regarded as a tool for the recreation or rewriting of literature based on cultural norms. Translation became a bridge between cultures and as Dyson

(2009) believes that with a world of no translation, there will be only a mono-cultural world in which human beings would probably have no understanding of his heritage, or the ancient or modern.

Most of the prior literature has primarily focused on examining the underlying ideology, with a particular emphasis on the political discourse involved in translations to and from Persian. This examination has been carried out through various theoretical approaches. Notable studies in this domain include those by Jamshidian and Mohammadi (2012), Amirdabbaghian and Shunmugam (2019), Pirhayati (2019), Amirdabbaghian and Shangeetha (2020) and Naghmeh-Abbaspour and Amini (2022). They have primarily used different theoretical frameworks to explore these aspects. In the context of analyzing

Persian translations, the prevalent approach has been Critical Discourse Analysis. Researchers such as Heidari Moghadam and Kolahi (2015), Azadsarv et al. (2017), and Akbari Beiraq and Niku (2021) have adopted this method in their studies. What sets the current study apart from the existing literature is its distinctive analytical framework. Unlike the predominant use of Critical Discourse Analysis in previous research, this study relies on Discourse Analysis. This distinction makes the present research a unique and valuable contribution to the field of Persian translation studies.

Wilhelm Von Humboldt was the first to link language and culture, viewing language as dynamic and integral to cultural identity. According to Brown (2006), language and culture are inseparable; each reflects the other. Sapir (1956) echoes this, asserting that communication, whether explicit or implicit, underpins all cultural patterns and behaviors. Language, therefore, reflects societal values and actions, revealing ideological, social, and political stances. Zhang (2013) likens language and culture to living organisms, with language as the flesh and culture as the blood—neither can exist without the other. Similarly, Hongwei (1996) describes language as the lifeblood of culture, essential for its formation and development. Nida (1998) sees language and culture as intertwined symbolic systems, each shaping the other. Larson (1984) notes that language mirrors cultural aspects, influencing its vocabulary. Wardhaugh (2002) contends that analyzing language without culture is impossible, emphasizing that translation involves cultural de-coding, re-coding, and encoding.

The socio-cultural role of translation has evolved, impacting cultural perceptions and worldviews through its integration into the literary polysystem. Nida (1998) notes that while some cultural aspects are universal—such as basic human experiences like eating, sleeping, and feeling emotions—language directs speakers' attention to different aspects of the world, causing them to think differently. Therefore, translation involves finding appropriate ways of thinking in another language, not just seeking meanings. Larson (1984) emphasizes that one language cannot fully express the meanings of another; rather, meanings must be captured and expressed uniquely in the target language. Different societies interpret messages based on their cultural values, highlighting translation's role in linking universal cultures.

Halliday and Hasan (1985) stress the importance of understanding both the context of the situation and culture for adequate translation, as translating without cultural understanding is futile.

Thriveni (2002) argues that capturing and reflecting cultural meanings in translation requires a deep understanding of both source and target cultures. Translators must balance capturing local color with being understood by an external audience. The transmission of cultural elements through translation is complex, demanding thorough knowledge of linguistic and cultural elements. Pym (2006) describes the sociocultural approaches in Translation Studies as varied and multifaceted. Thriveni (2002) adds that culture, encompassing history, social structures, religion, and daily customs, influences language use and understanding. A linguistic theory of translation must, therefore, incorporate cultural aspects to ensure effective communication and understanding.

James (2002) mentions that the cultural implications for translation may take several forms varying from lexical content and syntax to ideologies and ways of life in each culture. In this regard, in the Indian and Persian cultures, the plural form of lexeme addressing someone could be regarded as respect to the person which singular cannot be substituted because there is a cultural value behind this structure. In this regard, translators need to understand the attitudes and values of one culture to understand the source text and transfer those beliefs, attitudes, and values. Adegbija (2004, p.50) also stresses that the speaker must employ politeness strategies when the addressee is elder, or his/her social status or culture is high. Regarding social relationships, in Thriveni's (2002) opinion, most Indians used to live with their extended families. For this reason, there are different words in all Indian languages to refer to each relation. There are words to address a wife's mother or father, a wife's sister or brother, a husband's sister or brother, a mother's sister, or brother, and so on. It can be said that customs, traditions, religious elements, myths, and legends are part of a culture, and these issues vary from culture to culture. For instance, the meaning that different colors imply varies between cultures. White represents purity and black signifies evil in the Indian context, but it probably is different in other cultures. "The literary language reflects the heritage and the traditions of the society which appears through using referential

words, personification, and symbolism to give the same emotional atmosphere and the same mental picture to reader” (Anani, 1997).

Cultures vary significantly in their use of culture-specific words, expressions, idioms, and other lexical and grammatical categories. A skilled translator must recognize and accurately translate these into the target language, finding proper cultural equivalents. Baker and Malmkjær (1998) define equivalence as the relationship between a source text (ST) and a target text (TT) that allows the TT to be recognized as a translation of the ST. Cultural equivalence involves appropriately using cultural components to help readers clearly understand the intent. Modern translation focuses not just on equivalence and faithfulness but on recreating the closest concept with a similar effect. Newmark (1988) believes a translator should respect cultural achievements and consider both the context and the readership’s cultural and linguistic levels.

Baker (2011) outlines equivalence at various levels, noting that cultural equivalence enables readers to recognize familiar and appealing concepts with similar impacts. Zakhir (2009) explains that cultural equivalence aims to reproduce the ST’s cultural features in the TT, encompassing geography, climate, history, tradition, religion, and social behavior. Cultural equivalence is easier when cultural terms are universally known. It involves interpreting SL cultural features into TL in a way that helps readers understand foreign cultures through their own cultural lens. Presupposition in translation is also crucial, as cultural elements may vary across contexts. Understanding and translating these culturally bound elements, along with cultural presuppositions, is essential for providing the TT reader with a comprehensive understanding.

## II. METHODS

Discourse Analysis (DA) is an analytical framework designed to study text and talk within communicative contexts. It encompasses various analyses of discourse informed by linguistic theory and terminology, often synonymous with text analysis. DA focuses on coherence, cohesion, and rules for speech acts, examining linguistic relations and structures within discourse (Cambridge Online English Dictionary, 2023). Early DA, known as Linguistic Analysis or text analytic approach, emphasized the internal structure of texts, including linguistic devices that unify parts into wholes and

principles of grammatical cohesion and semantics (Fitch & Sanders, 2005, p.253). Texts are now viewed as processes and products interpreted within specific social contexts, not merely systems of signs existing outside social reality. Halliday’s tri-strata model, foundational for various DA models, analyzes texts through three inseparable elements: language use, communication, and interaction (van Dijk, 1997, p.5) or description, interpretation, and explanation of social and cultural contexts (Fairclough, 1999, p.180).

Discourse analysts emphasize interpretative work, recognizing that communication involves more than just message transfer from sender to receiver (Chilton & Schaffner, 2002, p.9). Modern DA, a trans-disciplinary approach, incorporates both linguistic (micro-level) and social (macro-level) analyses. It views discourses as communicative events involving language use, belief communication, and social interaction (van Dijk, 1997, p.3). Modern DA spans a range of related but contrasting types of work, often seen as a methodology or critique allied to social constructionism or social power dynamics (Fitch & Sanders, 2005, p.254). Beyond linguistics and semiotics, DA is central to the humanities and social sciences. Its roots lie in linguistics, linguistic philosophy, social anthropology, and theoretical sociology, with differing methods across disciplines. Linguists focus on text and textual structures, while others emphasize conversational analysis or functional analysis. Social scientists and political analysts use DA to examine language patterns in society, relating to social structures, events, power relations, and ideological critique, a branch known as critical discourse analysis (CDA).

## Research Approaches

The research approach applied to this study is *interpretive* which is based on data selection, content analyzing, observation, and discourse analysis (DA). The paper emphasizes is on the role of cultural factors and implications in translation, believing that different translators have different interpretations of the same text based on their cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the present paper is descriptive and interpretive based on concrete evidence and does not intend to evaluate the correctness or accuracy of translated text but to how different cultural filters deal with the cultural words in the ST.

## Theoretical Framework

The *Cultural Turn* has altered the focus of translation scholars from totally linguistic to function. So, culture has significance in translation due to it has brought various perspectives into the field. It is worth noting that different cultures impose their cultural views (domesticize) the ST as much as possible to make the original fit the receiving culture in a proper way. Regarding the issue, the cultures most probably produce different work in terms of message and meaning. Therefore, to understand the cultural implications and how to convey them in translation, the present study employed Bassnett and Lefevere's (1992) cultural theory in which they believe that language expresses culture and translators are supposed to be bi-cultural to understand not only the languages but social knowledge between which they operate. Culture then is not a word, sentence, or text but an operational unit of translation (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1992, p.11).

Presuppositions in translation are vast and complex, primarily because cultural implications manifest differently across languages through unique lexical and grammatical systems. These cultural words are deeply rooted in the source language (SL) and its cultural values, posing significant challenges in finding appropriate cultural equivalents in the target language (TL). Cultural differences extend beyond mere words, terms, and expressions; they encompass the broader cultural background knowledge inherent in the SL. Translators often lack this cultural background knowledge in both the SL and TL. One way to access this knowledge is through the presuppositions and assumptions embedded in the source text (ST), which influence the perception of the ST and the structure of the TL.

Pott (2013) defines presuppositions as the information a speaker assumes to make their utterance meaningful in the current context. Fawcett (2014) categorizes presuppositions into linguistic and non-linguistic, with the latter related to contextual and cultural aspects. Fawcett (2014) notes that both types of presuppositions, revealed through various triggers, are numerous in our speech and writing. Baker (2011) describes presupposition as a pragmatic inference linked to the linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge the sender assumes the receiver possesses. For instance, the sentence "Bill's wife is beautiful" presupposes that Bill is

married. Chen (2008) emphasizes that cultural presupposition is the cultural knowledge of the ST that the translator assumes the target reader possesses. The translator conveys this cultural presupposition to the target audience, affecting their understanding. Fawcett (2014) highlights the challenge translators face if they do not share the presupposed knowledge, necessitating research to acquire it. Translators must also estimate the extent to which the target audience shares these presuppositions. El-Gamal (2001) notes that the accuracy of a translation relies heavily on capturing not only the propositional meaning of the SL text but also its thematic meaning. Ignoring the distribution of presupposed, given, or new information can lead to a loss of meaning and inconsistency with the SL author's intentions.

## Procedure

Since the original version (Sanskrit) of *Panchatantra* is lost and not available (according to the leading scholars) and claiming that any translation has a different function in a different culture or within the same culture in a different time era, the current study presents the Persian version of *Panchatantra* as the source text and the English translation of it as the target text. The corpus used in this study are from the Persian *Panchatantra* translated by Monshi, reprinted in 2010 and the English *Panchatantra* translated by Ryder in 1925. The story *Crow and Snake* found in *Panchatantra* is selected as data in this research. The unit of translation for analysis is considered at discourse level. One sentence of the Persian is compared with a sentence in the English version of the same story. Firstly, the Persian sentence analyzed and discussed at the discourse level which focuses specifically on the cultural message; second, the English version analyzed to observe how the English translator conveyed this message and meaning in his cultural milieu.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Findings

In this section, the samples are analyzed and interpreted based on the textual structure to understand the function of the translation in the context it is translated for. The study challenged to clarify the reasons why these translations apply unnecessary cultural elements to the final version which leads to the creation of new work and the invisibility of the translator. Moreover,

the sociocultural context in which the texts and the discursive practices are taking place were carefully analyzed. In other words, the function of translation in a larger and broader context such as Eastern and Western cultural context were explored in this section.

#### Sample 1.

*Persian:*

... "آورده اند که زاغی در کوه بر بالای درختی خانه داشت."

*Gloss Translation:*

... "It is said that a magpie had a house on top of a tree in the mountain".

*English:*

"In a certain region grew a great banyan tree. In it lived a crow and his wife."

#### Sample 1 Discussion:

In the Persian sample, there is no clue or hint for any specific culture i.e., there are no cultural elements. The term "آورده اند..." means 'it is told', in the beginning, shows that the story is retold not created and the origin of it is unclear. There is one participant, and the gender of the crow is not clear, and it is not clear on which type of tree the crow had a nest. The sentence does not signify any cultural context and its simple written form discloses that it is written for children. In the English sample, there is a cultural word 'banyan' which refers specifically to the 'Indian banyan', the national tree of India which made a story sound Indian. The story began as if it was written by an author. There are two participants such as *crow and his wife* which signifies a family.

#### Sample 2.

*Persian:*

"هرگاه که زاغ بچه بیرون آوردی مار بخوردی."

*Gloss Translation:*

"Whenever the crow brought out (gave birth to) a baby, snake ate (it)".

*English:*

"But a black snake crawled through the hollow trunk and ate their chicks as fast as they were born, even before baptism."

#### Sample 2 Discussion:

The Persian sentence is very simple with no cultural words. English sample allocated the color *black* to the snake. Furthermore, the term *baptism* used by the translator reveals a religious cultural view. Baptism is the one sacrament that

all Christians have in common. In the Catholic Church, infants are baptized to welcome them into the Catholic faith. The English translator implicated a pattern of the relationship in western families by the term 'my dear' in the dialogue between crows.

#### Sample 3.

*Persian:*

شغال گفت: "من تو را وجهی نمایم"

*Gloss Translation:*

The jackal said: "I tell you something."

*English:*

"My friend," said the jackal, "I have thought the matter through."

#### Sample 3 Discussion:

The Persian sentence is metaphorical but no metaphor in English translation. The politeness, in the Persian translation, strategy is preserved in the sentence "من تو را وجهی نمایم" that means 'I tell you something' as it is a very formal language that is used to show the positions of the participants whether they are the main or the subordinated character. There are three participants: a jackal, a crow, and a snake whose genders have not been clearly mentioned. The interaction of the participants is monolog. The crow is the addressee and subordinate and the jackal acts as an advice-giver who suggests a solution and teaches a trick to crow to fight with the snake. The crow based on mythology is a symbol of health, wealth, and prophecy in western culture. Jackal is a symbol of cunning and trick that is considered as the protagonist in all Iranian folktales. The jackal and the crow have different social stances i.e., there is an unequal power relation between them. The third pronoun singular "I" refers to the jackal that implies authority in this context.

#### Sample 4.

*Persian:*

شغال گفت: "صواب آن می نمایم که در اوج هوا پرواز کنی و

در بامها و صحراها چشم می اندازی تا نظر بر پیرایه

ای گشاده افگنی که ربودن آن میسر باشد فرود آیی و آن را برداری."

*Gloss Translation:*

The jackal said: "I suggest that you fly high in the air and look at the rooftops and deserts until you see a large piece of ornament that can be stolen, land and take it."

*English:*

Jackal answered: "Go to some spot frequented by a great monarch. There seize a golden chain or a necklace from

some wealthy man who guards it carelessly. Deposit this in such a place that when it is recovered, the snake may be killed."

#### Sample 4 Discussion:

In this sample, the Persian story normalizes the robbery as a social action inspiring that the robbery is not blameworthy if one is in danger and robbery is a means to save himself and his family's life and in difficulties and hard times could be used as a weapon against an enemy. But it is not addressing certain people to steal from. In the English story, there is a noticeable point that the translator explicitly emphasized, and it is the issue of monarchy and power. The text implicitly discloses the caste system in such societies saying that gold and worthy materials could only be found in the palace of monarchs.

#### Sample 5.

*Persian:*

’زاع روی به آبادانی نهاد زنی را دید پیرایه برگوشه بام نهاده و  
خود بطهارت مشغول گشته ؛ در ربود و بر آن ترتیب  
که گفته بود بر مار انداخت. مردمان که در پی زاع بودند در حال  
سر مار بکوفتند و زاع باز رست.“

*Gloss Translation:*

“The crow went towards the settlement and saw a woman who put aside an ornament on a rooftop and busy cleaning; [the crow] stole it and as said [the crow] dropped it on the snake. The people who were chasing the crow, smashed the snake's head and the crow escaped again.”

*English:*

“... the wife came upon a certain pond...she saw the women of a king's court playing in the water, and on the bank, they had laid golden chains, pearl necklaces, garments, and gems. One chain of gold the crow-hen seized...the chamberlains...picked up clubs and ran in pursuit... the crow-hen dropped the golden chain in the snake's hole...when the king's men... found a hole and killed him with their clubs...”

#### Sample 5 Discussion:

The Persian version is very general. The translator has not mentioned the details of what kind of “پیرایه” (women's decorative) the crow steals. The cultural term “طهارت” means “cleanliness” but the term signifies a sort of religious duty practiced by Muslims. In the English translation, there are a few issues emphasized by the translator which reveal the cultural pattern of the west. The first one is the translator's concerns the social class and power relations mentioning that the king and his family are

the owners of the wealth of territory as it is obvious in the sentence “the crow-hen comes to the palace and see the women of king's court are playing...”. The second issue is that the story implies that only the king and his people could kill people as in the sentence *...the king's men...killed him*. The other issue is the significant female and her braveness and scarification in society. Due to the issue, the translator added a female participant “crow-hen” to the story and the gender of the crow is clear. The translator added one participant (crow-hen) to the story to excessively magnify the role of the female in the Western family. Even this magnification is clear in the title of the story. The other point is the role of a famine (mother) in the family and society which is bold and more explicitly relates to the issue of feminism. In the English translation, from the middle of the story, the male crow disappears; the crow-hen is suffering from the death of her children, and she only is looking for a solution. She puts herself into trouble by seizing the gold as in the sentences “crow-hen seized and started for the tree [...] the crow-hen dropped the golden chain” which are obvious from repetitions of the term.

#### Discussion

Based on the findings and analyzed samples, it can be asserted that the process of translation encompasses two simultaneous activities: the transfer of language and the transposition of culture. Additionally, it is evident that in addition to linguistic expertise, cultural knowledge plays a crucial role for translators working on literary texts. In other words, a successful translator must possess both bilingual and bicultural competence. This duality allows them to make informed decisions about the cultural elements within the source text (ST) and how extensively these should be conveyed into the target language (TL). The ultimate goal of translators is to ensure that the ST aligns with the cultural expectations and preferences of the TL audience.

Considering this, it becomes evident that both translators, when working on their individual interpretations of *Panchatantra*, employed their cultural sensibilities as a guiding filter. They made deliberate choices to emphasize particular cultural elements while downplaying others. Moreover, to enhance the text's relevance and clarity for the audience in the target language, they incorporated cultural expressions. For instance, in the English version, they used the term ‘baptism,’ while in the

Persian version, the term 'بطهارت' was employed. These choices aimed to ensure that the translated text resonated effectively with and was easily understood by the readers of the target language. It could be stated that the findings are all in line with the previous studies confirming that the lack of cultural and ideological knowledge of translators would influence the translated product negatively in terms of meaning and accuracy.

In summary, accessing cultural background knowledge through presuppositions and assumptions embedded in the ST is crucial for effective translation. This involves recognizing and accurately conveying the cultural implications of the SL in the TL. Both linguistic and non-linguistic presuppositions play a vital role in this process, and translators must navigate these to maintain the integrity and intent of the original text. Understanding the presupposed cultural knowledge helps bridge the gap between different cultural contexts, ensuring that the translation resonates with the target audience while preserving the essence of the source material.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Literature reflects a nation's culture, ideology, values, customs, traditions, and identity and folktales potentially are a great part of the

literature which is known as 'folklore'. Folktales demonstrate a general image of a nation that has been transferred beyond the boundaries by merchants, religious pilgrims, and immigrants. These tales communicate moral and social values, record historical events, and influence literature as well. On different occasions, folktales were told by people to others from different cultural backgrounds. In this transferring process, characters and places got new names and were changed into the familiar (domesticized). One of the worldwide famous ancient folktales is the *Panchatantra* which is a collection of Indian fables.

The main purpose of this study was to explore and investigate the differences in English and Persian translations of cultural and ideological nuances by employing interpretive Discourse Analysis with a focus on Bassnett and Lefevere's (1992) *Cultural Theory*. The findings indicate that the relationship between language and culture is indeed intricate. The lack of cultural and ideological understanding can usually result in misinterpretation and distortion of the intended message, indicating that insufficient cultural knowledge greatly affects translation accuracy. This could be true in different contexts if there were more investigations of *Panchatantra* in several other languages.

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