

Translating as Cultural Practice: An Introduction

The chapters collected in this monograph present translation in a wide range of roles: as a political and administrative tool, a poetic and metrical experiment, a philological reconstruction, a cognitive strategy and a means of creatively renewing tradition. Taken together, they show translation as something embedded in history and cultural imagination—never neutral, always interpretative.

The monograph opens with Elżbieta Świącicka's study of a Swedish-Turkish dictionary compiled in the early 18th century by Petter Carling during the exile of King Charles XII at Bender. She reads the manuscript as a transcription text, where Ottoman Turkish is recorded in the Latin alphabet following Swedish conventions. The dictionary served practical needs, but it also documents language contact and early attempts to capture Turkish phonetics. The historical situation after the defeat at Poltava explains why such a tool was necessary, especially when trust in dragomans was limited. Świącicka also draws attention to elements often overlooked in this kind of source: politeness formulas, short poetic fragments, everyday expressions and the deliberate effort to represent Turkish sounds in Swedish spelling. Here, translation appears as a way to survive culturally and politically, and to maintain communication in a foreign environment.

From this early modern setting, the monograph moves into the field of religious texts and philological analysis. Mirosław Michalak offers a detailed re-examination of a challenging passage in the Pahlavi *Vidēvdād* (2.6), where Ahura Mazda gives Yima two enigmatic objects. Through close analysis of Avestan vocabulary, Middle Persian *zand* glosses, heterograms and manuscript variants, he identifies the crucial Aramaeogram *mtl'k* as *pēsīdag* ('gilt') and challenges long-accepted interpretations that saw the objects as weapons, insignia or instruments. Instead, he suggests they are pastoral tools fitting Yima's role as herdsman-king. In this case translation is not just a matter of rendering words but of recovering cultural meaning through philology. It becomes an interpretative act that reshapes how we read a well-known religious text.

The third contribution, by Joanna Jurewicz, introduces a cognitive linguistic approach to translation. Drawing on her experience translating the *Mahābhārata*, she examines battle scenes as linguistic structures designed to guide the listener's perception. Word order, viewpoint shifts and zooming in or out affect the pace of the narrative and the emotional response. In this oral epic, grammar functions as a tool of visualisation and the text becomes almost cinematic. Comparing the Sanskrit with



an English translation, she shows how rigid word order in the target language can limit these effects. Her study raises a key question: can we translate not only what is said, but also how it is perceived?

After this cognitive perspective, the monograph turns to the challenges of metre and rhythm. Przemysław Szczurek reflects on translating Book IX (*Śalyaparvan*) of the *Mahābhārata* into Polish verse. Since Polish cannot reproduce Sanskrit quantitative metres such as *śloka*, *triṣṭubh* or *jagati*, he searches for functional equivalents in the Polish poetic tradition. He experiments with trochaic octosyllables, eleven- and twelve-syllable lines and dactylic or amphibrachic patterns, using them to bridge the gap between ancient form and modern reception. Metrical translation here is treated as cultural experimentation and creative reconstruction, but also as a test of intuition, discipline and the translator's judgement.

What in Poland appears as an ambitious individual project takes on legendary scale in Kerala. Rajendran Chettiarthodi examines the work of Kuṇṇikkutṭan Tampurān, who translated the entire *Mahābhārata* into Malayalam in only 874 days while preserving the original metres. Rajendran places this achievement within local literary traditions (*pāṭṭu*, *maṇipravāla*, the Venmaṇi school) and compares it with looser devotional retellings and K.M. Ganguli's prose translation. He shows how Tampurān combines classical metrical precision with colloquial, lively Malayalam, making the epic both faithful to form and accessible to readers. In this case, translation becomes a performative act and a cultural milestone.


From India, the focus shifts to Spain, England and Sanskrit. Hermina Cielas Leão and David Pierdominici Leão analyse *Ḍān Kvikṣoṭaḥ* (1936), a Sanskrit version of *Don Quixote* translated by two *paṇḍits* from Charles Jarvis's 18th-century English version. Using the famous windmill episode, they demonstrate how translation through an intermediary language causes semantic shifts, loss of wordplay and changes in register and syntax. At the same time, they show how the translators attempt to adapt Cervantes to the classical Sanskrit tradition by using elevated diction and metrical patterns. This article explores the limits of translation and asks what happens when cultural exchange occurs indirectly, through a third language.


In the following chapter, Marta Karcz examines two modern Sanskrit translations of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyats*, both based on Fitzgerald's English version. She looks at metre, vocabulary and stylistic strategies, showing how Sanskrit is used to express Persian scepticism, hedonism and philosophical reflection. The translators navigate between domestication (drawing on Indian metaphors and aesthetics) and the preservation of the original's foreignness. Translation here becomes a space where literary and religious traditions meet, but also a way of modernising Sanskrit and extending its expressive potential.

The monograph concludes with a study by Vance Schaefer and Tamara Warhol, who turn to audiovisual translation. Comparing Thai and English translations of dialogue from Japanese television dramas, they show how the Thai versions retain a wide range of registers, politeness levels, emotional nuance and sociolinguistic variation. The English versions, however, tend to simplify and neutralise these features. As

a result, the Thai translations appear ‘technicolour’, while the English ones become ‘monochrome’. The article reveals how linguistic norms, audience expectations and translation conventions shape what can be preserved and what is lost. Translation becomes both a reflection of cultural difference and a force that reshapes narrative meaning.

Bridging Worlds: Translation as Cultural Practice presents translation as a space where disciplines intersect: linguistics, literary theory, translation studies, intellectual history and the study of orality and literacy. It also brings together different historical periods (from ancient epics to modern media), aesthetic systems (quantitative verse, syllabotonic metre, colloquial speech, liturgical style, prose narrative) and translator roles (scholar, poet, official, performer, interpreter). Each contribution moves beyond the idea of translation as a simple transfer of content. The monograph shows that translation is always interpretation, reconstruction and negotiation. It not only reflects existing worlds but can also build new ones.

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