POLSKA AKADEMIA NAUK—ODDZIAŁ W KRAKOWIE
KOMISJA ORIENTALISTYCZNA

FOLIA ORIENTALIA—BIBLIOTHECA 2

Bridging Worlds: Translation as Cultural Practice

edited by
Maciej Klimiuk and Arkadiusz Płonka

Kraków 2025

Editor-in-Chief
Arkadiusz Płonka (Jagiellonian University, Poland)

Deputy Editor-in-Chief
Maciej Klimiuk (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany)

Secretary
Tomasz Babnis (Jagiellonian University, Poland)

Editorial Board
Sergio Baldi (University of Naples 'L'Orientale', Italy)
Livnat Holtzman (Bar-Ilan University, Israel)
Anna Krasnowolska (Jagiellonian University, Poland)
Bettina Leitner (University of Vienna, Austria)
Ewa Siemieniec-Gołaś (Jagiellonian University, Poland)
Lidia Sudyka (Jagiellonian University, Poland)
Joachim Śliwa (Jagiellonian University, Poland)

International Advisory Board
Arshin Adib-Moghaddam (SOAS University of London, United Kingdom)
Werner Arnold (Heidelberg University, Center for Jewish Studies Heidelberg, Germany)
Fida Bizri (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, France)
Emanuela de Blasio (Tuscia University, Viterbo, Italy)
Michael Knüppel (Liaocheng University, China)
Mena B. Lafkioui (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales,
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, France)
Karin Preisendanz (University of Vienna, Austria)
Stephan Procházka (University of Vienna, Austria)
Franck Salameh (Boston College, United States)
Ori Shachmon (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel)
Juan-Pablo Vita (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Spain)

© Copyright for texts: the Authors
© Copyright for the Edition: Polish Academy of Sciences – Kraków Branch

Folia Orientalia—Bibliotheca constitutes an integral supplement to the journal *Folia Orientalia*, issued by the Polish Academy of Sciences – Kraków Branch.

This is an Open Access publication distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Folia Orientalia
Polish Academy of Sciences
św. Jana 28, 31-018 Kraków, Poland
folia.orientalia@uj.edu.pl

ISSN 0015-5675

ISBN: 978-83-68418-26-2

Contents

Preface 5

Translating as Cultural Practice: An Introduction
(by Maciej Klimiuk and Arkadiusz Płonka) 7

Elżbieta Święcicka
The Swedish-Turkish Dictionary Written for Charles XII, King of Sweden: Preliminary Notes 11

Mirosław Michalak
Reconsidering a Paragraph of the Pahlavi *Vidēvdād* and Its Translation 29

Joanna Jurewicz
Translation of the *Mahābhārata* and Cognitive Linguistics 47

Przemysław Szczurek
How to Translate an Epic Text Metrically When You Are Neither a Poet Nor a Professional Translator? A Few Remarks on Difficulties in Translating Book 9 (*Śalyaparvan*) of the *Mahābhārata* 67

Rajendran Chettiarthodi
Translation as a 'Superhuman' Feat: A Metrical *Mahābhārata* in Malayalam 89

Hermina Cielas Leão and David Pierdominici Leão
From La Mancha to Kashmir: Notes on the Windmill Episode in the Sanskrit Version of *Don Quijote* 99

Marta Karcz
Modern Sanskrit Translations of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyats*: Navigating Cultural and Linguistic Landscapes 113

Vance Schaefer and Tamara Warhol
Technicolor Thai Translations versus Monochromatic English Translations of Japanese TV Dialogues 125

Preface

This collective monograph in the 'Folia Orientalia—Bibliotheca' series, *Bridging Worlds: Translation as Cultural Practice*, edited by Maciej Klimiuk and Arkadiusz Płonka, presents a selection of papers delivered at the Fifth International Conference *Asian and African Languages in Translation and Interpretation*, held on 17–18 May 2024 in Kraków. The conference was jointly organised by the Commission of Oriental Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Kraków Branch) and the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Jagiellonian University.

Organising Committee:

- Professor Anna Krasnowolska (President of the Organising Committee)
- Dr Tomasz Babnis
- Dr Karolina Wanda Olszowska
- Professor Kinga Paraskiewicz
- Dr Bartosz Pietrzak
- Dr Arkadiusz Płonka
- Professor Ewa Siemieniec-Gołaś
- Professor Lidia Sudyka

The organisation of the conference was made possible through funding provided by the Polish Academy of Sciences and the *Excellence Initiative—Research University* (IDUB) programme at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

All chapters in this monograph have undergone at least a double-blind peer review. We would like to express our sincere thanks to all the reviewers for their careful reading, insightful comments and the time and effort they devoted to this demanding work. We also thank the authors for their cooperation, responsiveness and commitment throughout the editorial process.

Finally, we wish to express our deep gratitude to the Organising Committee of the Conference and to the Commission of Oriental Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Kraków Branch) for their confidence in us and for entrusting us with the preparation and editorial care of this monograph. Their trust, support and collaboration made it possible to bring this volume to completion, and we are honoured to have been able to develop the scholarly vision initiated at the Conference.

Maciej Klimiuk and Arkadiusz Płonka
Berlin and Kraków, October 2025

© 2025 The Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

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 Święcicka'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. Święcicka 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

© 2025 The Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

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 *jagatī*, 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 Kuññikkuṭṭan 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*, *maṇipravāḷa*, the Veṇmaṇi 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.

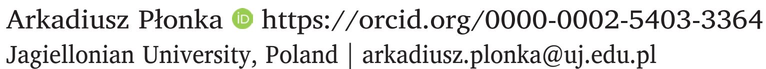
In the following chapter, Marta Karcz examines two modern Sanskrit translations of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyats*, both based on Fitzgerald's English version. She looks at metre, vocabulary and stylistic strategies, showing how Sanskrit is used to express Persian scepticism, hedonism and philosophical reflection. 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.

Maciej Klimiuk https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4936-350X
Freie Universität Berlin, Germany | klimiuk.maciej@gmail.com


Arkadiusz Płonka https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5403-3364
Jagiellonian University, Poland | arkadiusz.plonka@uj.edu.pl

FOLIA ORIENTALIA—BIBLIOTHECA 2 (2025)
DOI 10.24425/for.2025.156876

Elżbieta Święcicka
Stockholm University, Sweden | elzbieta.swiecicka2014@gmail.com

The Swedish-Turkish Dictionary Written for Charles XII, King of Sweden: Preliminary Notes

Abstract For Europeans, developing expertise in the Turkish language and creating dictionaries was usually to meet the needs of missionaries, individuals on personal pilgrimages, or extended stays in Turkish captivity. These valuable dictionaries, some of which belong to the so-called transcription texts, i.e. written in alphabets other than Arabic alphabet. However, the origins of Petter Carling's Swedish-Turkish dictionary are quite different and unique. This dictionary was written in Ottoman Turkey, at the military camp of Swedish king, Charles XII, near the small fortress-town of Bender in modern day Moldova, following the Swedish defeat by Peter I of Russia at the battle of Poltava. Carling adopted the Latin writing system and Swedish spelling conventions to reflect the phonetic structure of Turkish, thereby capturing its pronunciation. The dictionary is a unique example of a transcription text and a practical illustration of cross-cultural communication, as it facilitates the exchange of information between people of different cultures, primarily for use in various business transactions that were needed to keep the military camp functioning.

Keywords Swedish-Turkish dictionary, Charles XII of Sweden, Petter Carling, Ottoman Empire, Great Northern War, transcription texts, historical lexicography, cross-cultural communication

1 Introduction

The Rogge Library's manuscript department in Strängnäs, a department of the National Library of Sweden, has a small book, approximately 23.6 × 9.3 × 2.7 cm in dimensions, bound in a dark, worn all-French binding. It is listed under *Tursk Dictionair skrifwin wid Bender af P. Carling, Holmensis in Suecia*[1] without a signum. After the author's title on p. 5, it reads: Turkish Dictionary written in Bender by P. Carling, *Stockholmer in Sweden.*

The dictionary was written in Bender, in modern day Moldova, as the author Petter Carling writes in the title. Petter Carling was a member of the Royal Swedish Expedition as a non-commissioned officer (Djurberg 1913: 105–106) in 1710, and

[1] The title is noted on p. 10 of the digitised version, which includes binding and a couple of blank pages. In English: 'Turkish Dictionary, written in Bender by P. Carling, Stockholmer in Sweden'. The book remains in manuscript. *Dictionair* was donated to the library in Strängnäs in October 1825, according to a note on the last page of the book: *Given till Kungl. Gimnasii Bibliothequet i Strengths af framl. Enkefru Lectorskan Haggrenn, Sterbhus d. 4 Oct. 1825.*

© 2025 The Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

then as an appointed Field Commissary in the Bender Dragoon Regiment in 1711. The Royal Swedish Expedition was led by the eleven remaining members of the Swedish Life Regiment not killed or captured following Charles XII's 'poltavian action', i.e. the defeat at Poltava on 28 June 1709. About thirty thousand Swedes had been taken prisoner by the Russians, but Carling was one of those who, through a miracle, as he writes in his memoirs,[2] managed to escape Russian captivity and join Charles XII in Bender, which at that time belonged to the Ottoman Empire.

2 Historical background

Sweden entered the 18th century as a great power with foreign possessions including Finland, Estonia, Livonia, Pomerania, and the mouths of the Oder, Elbe, and Weser, which were important customs collection points. Between 1700 and 1721, Sweden was at war, fighting what is known as the Great Nordic War in Swedish history, when Charles XII (1682–1718), king of Sweden (1697–1718), facing off against Frederick IV of Denmark-Norway, August II the Strong of Saxony-Poland-Lithuania, and Peter I of Muscovy/Russia, whose goal was expansion and securing access to the Baltic Sea.[3] The defence of the Baltic started well for the Swedish king with victories at Travendal and Narva, against the Danes and Russians respectively, in 1700, but soon Peter I gained ground in the Swedish Baltic provinces. He was able to secure Russia's access to the Baltic Sea and founded Saint Petersburg in 1703.

In Poland-Lithuania, the political situation was chaotic, with two competing kings backed by the different warring factions: Augustus the Strong (1697–1706, 1709–1733), who was supported by Peter I, and Stanisław Leszczyński (1704–1710), who was appointed and supported by Charles XII. Allied to the Swedish side were the House of Holstein-Gottorp and the Cossacks under the Cossack hetman Ivan Mazepa (1708–1710).[4] The Crimean Tatars, under the leadership of Khan Devlet II Girey (1699–1702), (1709–1713) and Kaplan I Girey (1713–1715) also wanted to join the Swedish anti-Russian campaign, and they took part in some battles, but were either prevented by the Sublime Porte (the Ottoman government), as in 1708, or Charles XII's

2 Copy of Carling's 'Memorial' and statements 17 March 1735, Avräkningskontoret 3683. In Memorial, he writes about his 34 years of service rendered to the King and the Crown, his many adventures endured, severe captivity and afterwards distress and poverty. He expected some pension for his 34 years of service and hardship. Only in 1739 was his request heard, and he was granted an annual expectation salary of 50 thalers (silver) coins.

3 There are many publications on this subject, as in Wikander (1922); see also the consistent description of the life and activities of Charles XII in Larsson (2009: 21, 37–39, 64, 65, 115, 116, 143–155).

4 Mazepa Ivan (Jan) was the Zaporozhian Hetman who, along with 3,000 Cossacks, refused to submit to Tsar Peter I, and hoped that Charles XII would help him regain power in Ukraine. Charles XII likely granted Mazepa the right to use the colours of the Swedish military *bandera* (yellow and blue) as the insignia of the Cossack detachments led by Mazepa. Later, these would be the colours of the flag of Ukraine. Mazepa's successor was Polyp Orlyk (1672–1742), who accompanied Charles XII to Bender. He is the author of one of the oldest democratic constitutions, called the Bender Constitution, written in 1710. The original is in *Diplomatica Cosacica* in The Swedish National Archives. Accessed 1 October 2025. https://sok.riksarkivet.se/arkiv/FIMNeBUQrH6d0002H087k3.

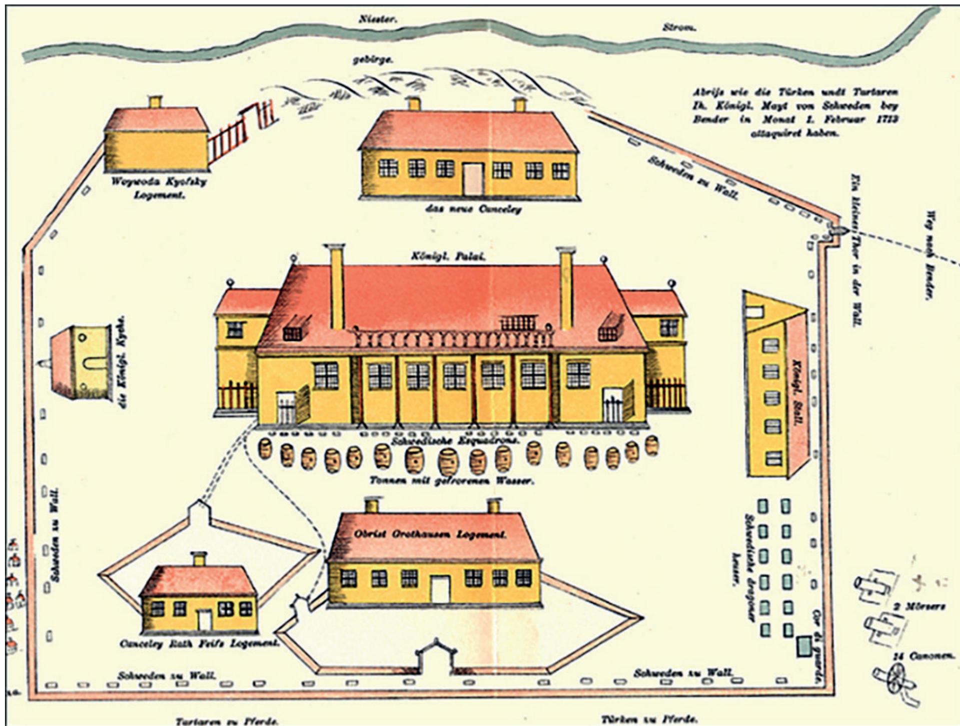


Figure 1. Contemporary depiction of Charles XII's camp near Bender. The camp was used from 1711 to the Skirmish at Bender in 1713
(Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ritning_%C3%B6ver_Karlopolis.jpg)

hesitation on whether to allow them to join the coalition, as in 1710.[5] The Swedish king Charles XII and his allies' forces were finally defeated by Peter I in 1709 at Poltava, located in modern day Ukraine. After the battle, the defeated king fled to the fortress town of Bender in the western part of the Ottoman Empire, accompanied by approximately 1,000 Swedes, both military personnel and civilians.[6]

Charles XII installed himself on Ottoman soil, in a newly built camp at the village of Varnitsa next to the town. He soon sent his secretary Martin Neugebauer and the Polish general Stanisław Poniatowski to the Grand Vizier Çorlulu Damat Ali Pasha, with a letter to Sultan Ahmed III thanking him for giving the Swedes sanctuary and asking the Sultan to accept Neugebauer as an envoy with the right to stay in the

5 Since the 16th century, the Crimean Tatars had been trying to draw the Swedes' attention to Moscow's growing military power and appetite for territories neighbouring Moscow. Since the reign of John III, the Swedes were offered Tatar help if they decided to start a war against Russia. It was not 'received with any particular enthusiasm by the Swedes at that time' (Zetterstéen 1952; Święcicka 1997; Święcicka 2002).

6 Then, Bender was a fortress on the border of the Ottoman state, under a *Sereskier*, an Ottoman Commander. The province of Moldavia had limited autonomy under Prince Nikolaos Mavrokordato. Today, it is a large city in Moldova known as Bendery.

capital. The king intended to enter an alliance of attack and defence with the Ottomans (Refik 1922: 11–13). Alternatively, the Sublime Porte also offered to escort the king through Poland to Sweden under the protection of Turkish and Cossack troops.

Negotiations were delayed by Charles XII, who still harboured hopes of returning to the political scene and continuing the war against Moscow and its allies.[7] Such an opportunity arose in 1711, two years after the king had arrived at Bender, after Tsar Peter and his troops were surrounded by Turkish-Tatar-Polish-Swedish troops in the basin of the Prut River in present-day Moldavia. For various reasons, the Ottoman Grand Vizier Baltacı Mehmet Pasha squandered the advantage, and after the battle signed an unfavourable treaty for peace with Peter I, later ratified as the Treaty of Adrianople of 1713 (Stille 1918: 361–367; Wikander 1922: 140–142).

After Ahmed III had signed the Treaty of the Pruth making peace with Russia in 1711, he wrote a personal letter to Charles XII that the king 'should, however, be able to return to his kingdoms unhindered' (Tengberg 1953: 193).

The Sublime Porte repeatedly urged the king to leave Ottoman territory to avoid conflict with Russia and eventually demanded his departure. However, the king chose to delay his departure due to fear of the dangerous journey through Poland,[8] and mounting financial difficulties (Tengberg 1953: 223, 244). Finally, in February 1713, the Ottomans decided to dislodge the king from his camp by force, and after several dramatic confrontations, such as the famous *kalabalik*[9] (skirmish), forced him to leave Bender.

After a short stay in Timurtasch outside Adrianople and in Demotika (Gouridis and Sandin 2015: 122–141), the Swedish king, his entourage and what was left of his army made a remarkable two-week ride through Central Europe, arriving at Stralsund, the penultimate Swedish stronghold on the European continent, in October 1714.[10]

3 Dictionary

A closer look at the dictionary and additional texts in the notes show the reasons behind its creation.

7 The Ottoman Empire, Crimean Tatars with Devlet II Girey, Polish King Stanisław Leszczyński, and the Cossack hetman Ivan Mazepa and his relative, Polyp Orlyk; The Swedish-Tatar-Turkish contacts were beneficial for all parties, to keep the Russians in check. Charles XII, his policies and especially his stay in the Ottoman Empire, have been the subject of numerous publications. See Ericson Wolke (2015: 13–23); Savchuk (2015:175–188); For Stanisław Leszczyński in Bender, see Kowalik (1973:121–142).

8 By then, Augustus the Strong had returned as a military actor in Poland. The Sublime Porte wished that Charles XII would sue for peace with Augustus to instead focus on Sweden and the Ottoman's shared enemy of Russia, but Charles refused (Tengberg, 1953: 209).

9 In Carling's dictionary, p. 64 <*kala balek*> folks myckenhet (crowd of people) (Liljegren 2015: 88–105).

10 After the Regiment's withdrawal from Turkey, Carling participated in the defence of Swedish Pomerania and Stralsund, which Charles XII led from November 1714. In December 1715, the king was forced to flee to Scania, while Carling ended up in Danish captivity. Again, Carling managed to escape, received the same instructions from the Royal War Expedition as before, and was sent to Visingsö, as is evident from the description of the Dragoon Regiment's commander, Colonel Anders Koskull. The Military Archives (KrA), documents: Numrerade handlingar 1052.2.

The first nine pages of Carling's notebook contain drafts of the *Calculation öfver Krieg* ('The Calculations on War'), with detailed information about the formation of a possible fighting force and its cost that, under the leadership of Charles XII, could be used as leverage in the political power game. The compilation of Swedish troops and potential mercenaries gives the impression that the king dictated this wish list.

The first words in the dictionary contain the statement that, because both the Ottoman Empire and Sweden were defeated by Christians, both countries should seek support from other oriental powers.

First, the forces of countries bordering the Ottoman Empire: the king in Persia, the so-called *Hispahan Padis hah*, 50,000 men of the *Stora Mongol* (Great Mongol), and 400,000 men of the *Indianiske stamm* (Indian tribe).[11] The author means that these countries perceive Russia as very capable of war, so in other words, a perilous enemy.

Moreover, Carling counts 100,000 men under a word *Zillkowet*,[12] to which he added forces used in sieges at *Jassi*,[13] along with *Aprocher ock i Rattlier,* i.e. the Turkish cavalry and infantry stationed, like the Tatars, across the Ottoman Empire. In all, he suggests that the Ottomans and their allies can form a huge army.

He also lists the cavalry *Kristnas Liv Drabanter,* who are to be paid daily with 1. *Slota*[14] or with 2. *Caroliner*.[15] And then he, or perhaps Charles XII, lists more of the intended military reinforcements as *Anadol Spahasi* (Anatolian Cavalry), Cavalry of *Bossna/Bosnien,* and Cavalry of *Macedonien* called *Arnaut Spahasi* or *Romuli* (Horsemen from Albania or Rum, i.e. European Turkey.) The wish-list continues. Turkmens with their beautiful horses, the Egyptian Cavalry regiment called *Missirle Spahasi*,[16] and the Egyptian Infantry called *Missirle jajan.* After adding *Tartar Cham* and the Tatars,[17] Carling comes up with an impressive number of some 533,000 warriors, who could be mobilised against Peter I.

Interestingly, he adds that he believes that some troops, such as those stationed in *Constantinopel Eski Jenizieri*,[18] do not need to be paid, as they receive 10 para per day from the sultan. The list of units goes on to include artillery drivers (*arabatski*), miners (*lagumtschi*), constables (non-commissioned officers in the artillery), assistant officers, and their camp-follower women (*markietan qvinnor*).

---

11 It is not yet clear what exactly Carling had in mind.

12 From Ottoman-Turkish ةوقلا ىذ 'powerful, mighty.' My gratitude to Anna Krasnowolska for pointing out the correct interpretation of this word. I would like to express my gratitude to Karin Borgkvist Ljung, Peter Nordström, and Göran Bäärnhjelm, who have supported me in deciphering Carling's handwritten text from the 18th century. The spelling of the same word varies, and some pages are illegible. However, any misinterpretations are mine.

13 Jassy (Iași), the county capital in present-day Romania, where part of the Bendery Dragoons was stationed.

14 *<slota> zolota* '*Thalerus Hollandicus, floreno Rhenensi aequivalens*', according to the dictionary *Thesaurus linguarum orientalium turcicae, arabicae, persicae* of Francisci à Mesgnien Meninski (1680).

15 Means of payment, one *carolin* during the time of Charles XII was equivalent to 2 marks in minted silver coins.

16 Horsemen from Egypt.

17 Tatar Khan.

18 *Yeniçeri* in Swedish. Janissaries, the sultan's bodyguard, until 1638, were forcibly recruited from the Christian population.

Carling omits, for some political reasons, the probable contingent of the Polish army. Leszczyński, who was placed on the Polish throne by Charles XII, spent a year in Bender proposing an alliance with his rival, August II, to Charles XII, ready to give up the throne in the name of a joint fight against the common enemy, Russia. It appears that the Swedish king did not support this plan, as he did not even receive Leszczyński in an audience (Kowalik 1973: 112–160).

These extracts from the notes, presented here, provide a detailed picture of the ambitious plans that would require large sums of money to recruit, uniform, and supply these troops with cannons, shells, and transport. If everything were to go according to these plans, and one were to add the sultan's troops, Carling estimates a total of about 1,360,000 men in the king's fighting force [sic].

The Sublime Porte granted the Swedish king a daily allowance of 414½ piasters (Refik 1922: 32)[19] and his crew all possible benefits, including maintenance in kind, the so-called *tain.*[20] This money would not be enough to realize Charles XII's grand plans, so later large sums were consequently borrowed from numerous creditors by royal order for *aflöning och fälttraktamente*,[21] later making *Riksrådet* (The National Council) unwilling to finance the king's war further.

Carling's cost estimate was probably written before December 1711, at least before Charles XII could have learned that the Ottoman Empire had signed a peace treaty with Peter I (the Peace of Pruth, 22 July 1711) and had chosen a new direction in foreign policy. Still, the exact timing is impossible to determine. Both Charles XII and the Sublime Porte wanted to postpone the decision on the king's return to Sweden, since the king's presence in Ottoman territory had a strengthening effect during the negotiations with Russia. Thus, Swedish planning for war was allowed to continue to the year 1713.

Directly after the page headed *Tursk Dictionair*, the reader will find the honorifics in Latin and Turkish that were used in correspondence with the then ally, the Tatar Khan Kaplan I Girey: *Tartar Haahns Titul in Latin, Serenissimo ac Potentissimo Kaplan Gierei Tartarous, Crimensium, Perecopensium, Nahaiensium, Bialohorodensium Budziacensium Magno Hano, Domino, Domino Clementissimo A: 1714.* In addition, Carling quotes a kind of *laudation* to *Osman Paschaner Turcky* in verse, in the Turkish language of the time, though not correctly rendered. Osman Pasha was an Ottoman governor of Bosnia who sympathized with Charles XII's anti-Russian plan,[22] mentioning Agha Yusuf Pasha.[23]

---

19 *Piaster*, or *kuruş*, were silver coins worth 40 *para*, or 18,6 Swedish öre.

20 *Ta'in*, a daily allowance given to all official diplomats visiting the Ottoman Empire (Munthe 1935: 201–231).

21 'pay and field allowance' (Refik 1922).

22 Probably later, Grand Vizier Topal Osman Pasha (1663–1733). Carling writes about potential allies, stating that one can count on the Cavalry's future *Bossnien*.

23 Ağa Yusuf Pasha (Yusuf Pasha the Agha), also known as Gürcü Yusuf Pasha (Yusuf Pasha the Georgian), was an 18th-century Ottoman military leader and Grand vizier. Yusuf Pasha was of Georgian origin. In 1710, he was appointed Agha of the Janissaries, commander of the Janissary corps.

Figure 2. The title page from Carling's dictionary
(Photo: National Library of Sweden)

During the exhausting retreat from the overwhelming defeat at Poltava, Charles XII's army discovered how difficult it was to cope without knowledge of local languages. The lack of possibility of communicating with local people was both a practical disadvantage and demoralizing (Widegren 2024: 35–36).

By the time the Swedish army reached Bender, they well-knew that knowledge of Turkish would be needed on-site at the camp to manage daily contacts and communicate with the envoys of potential allies. It was a well-established opinion that *dragomans*, i.e. Ottoman interpreters, could not be trusted.[24] The distrust of local interpreters and the desire to be able, at least to some extent, to control the translations, could be one of the reasons why Carling decided, or was ordered by the king, to compile a Swedish-Turkish dictionary.

On the pages of the dictionary where the reader finds an inventory of potential fighting forces and the estimated costs, individual Turkish words emerge, such as *atli* ('cavalry'), *yaymaklere* ('infantry'), *kale bekleren* ('permanent fortress garrison'), *Böyluk Spahasi* ('cavalry corps, later cavalry division'), *arabatski* ('artillery drivers'), etc.

The following part of Carling's notes consists of *Turkiska Galanterier* ('Turkish Courtesy phrases'). These short rhyming phrases could be uttered when it was necessary to initiate acquaintance, and following the Turkish *savoir vivre*, to begin contacts which were not necessarily professional. These typical rhythmic motifs of folk poetry are composed in syllabic metres, as a playful interplay between sounds, words, and images. In seven pages preceding the proper dictionary, Carling presented 54 such poetic *stanzas*.

Diplomat Gustav Celsing the Elder and one of his two sons, or a combination thereof,[25] later noted a whole 74 poetic *stanzas* in a draft for their own separate dictionary. Gustav Celsing the Elder was one of Charles XII's envoys to the Sublime Porte, and in all probability knew Petter Carling.[26] Gustav the Elder and his sons Gustav the Younger (1723–1789) and Ulric (1731–1805) were all Swedish diplomats in Constantinople at different times. They showed a genuine interest in the Turkish language and culture. They collected Turkish art and left behind three drafts of Turkish-Swedish dictionaries. Gustav the Elder Celsing was also the author of one

---

24 'The quality of the dragomans [who are] subjects of this Empire is such that having to depend in their jobs and in their everyday lives on those who have tyrannical authority [over them], they often adapt their interpretations more to the avarice and arrogance of the Turks than to the reputation and benefit of the affairs of [Venice], which creates indignity and burdens for the [ambassadors and *baili*] who cannot trust their translations.' There was a widespread opinion that they had poor qualifications and a tendency to serve various masters simultaneously. Some of the dragomans were competent, but the fear of authority caused a selective translation of the words of foreign diplomats (Dursteler 2006: 37). See also Lewis (2004: 31–32); Durban (2015: 107–128).

25 Their intellectual heritage has not yet been sufficiently explored. It has not yet been investigated who participated in creating the dictionaries and to what extent (Święcicka 2015: 341–353).

26 According to his own diary, Gustaf Celsing arrived in Bender in June 1709 and, on 28 August, set off for Constantinople on the king's orders. The diary also contains notes concerning diplomatic events and missions (Palm 1932–1933: 51–127; Święcicka 2015: 341–353).

of these dictionaries, once kept in the family archives at Biby, the family estate in Södermanland, and now at the National Archives.

Tell (Tel) [Thread]
Bir gedziä
Bise gel
(Bir gece bize gel)
[Come to me one night]

Celsing has noted a more extended version of the same *stanza*:

Tel
Bir gitscha bize gell,
Gonglymi ele al,
Bir gitsche bize kal.
(Bir gece bize gel, gönlümü ele al
Bir gece bize kal)
[Come to me one night
Take my heart,
Stay with me one night]

Mersin [Myrten][27]

Allah seni
Bana wersin
(Allah seni
Bana versin)
[May Allah give you to me]

Schinschir [Boxwood][28]

Acklin
Baschima
Dewischir
(Şimşir aklın
Başıma
Devşir)
[Your state of mind confused me]

27 The myrtle plant is associated with Demeter, Aphrodite, and Venus, and it is a symbol of love and the Hebrew symbol of marriage.
28 Boxwood was probably then and now a symbol of loyalty and class.

Tachta [Throne]

Seni giörmeli
Olde bir haffta
(Tahta
Seni görmeli
Bir hafta oldu)
[I have to see you. A week has gone by...]

Gun [Today]

Cande idin
Dun
(Gün
kande idin
Dün)
[Yesterday, you were on fire!]

Even at first glance, one can see that Carling noted words that he thought were helpful in everyday life at the camp near Bender.[29]

Carling presented his approximately 1000 entries, for the most part in alphabetical order.

Arbete <*isch*> 'iş' [work][30]
Altar <*minrab*> 'mihrab'[31] [altar]
Adelsman <*beg*>, <*schadeli*> 'beg, şadeli' [nobleman]

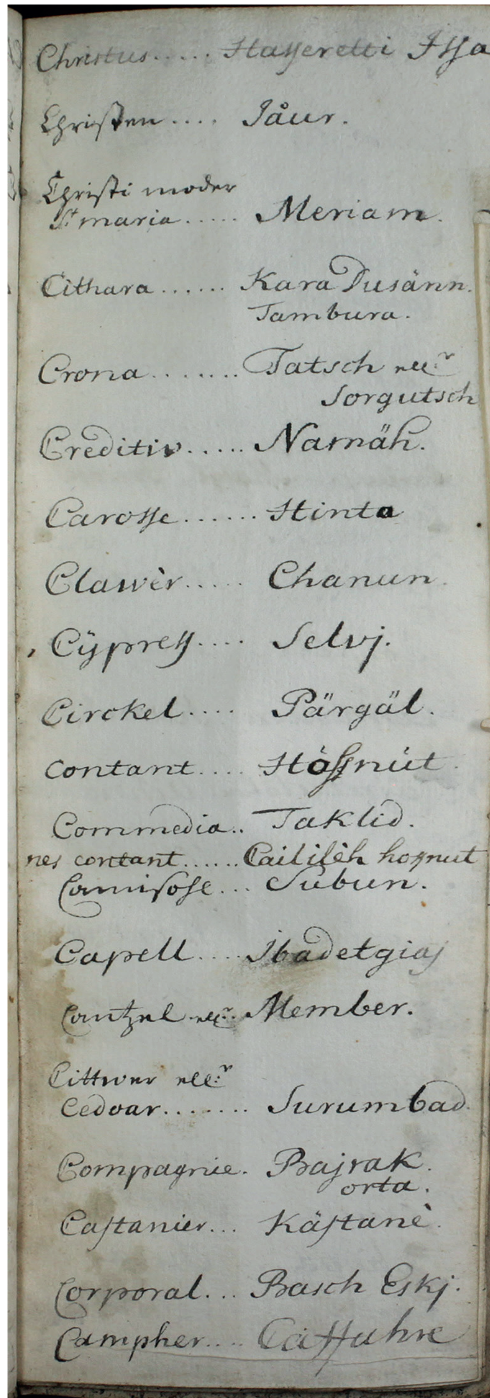
And eleven keywords later:

Adel <assel zadelik> 'asıl zadelik' [nobility]

Sometimes Carling sorts the words thematically according to the principle of association:

Bröd <äkmäk> (ekmek) [bread]
Bagare <äkmäktsihi> (ekmekçi) [baker]
Blod <kahn> (kan) [[blood]
blöda <*kan akmak*> [to bleed] (written with the modern spelling variant)

[29] Compiling Carling's interesting notes, especially the dictionary, seems very desirable in the future.
[30] Carling's entry in translation to English, rendered in [].
[31] A niche in a mosque that faces the Kaaba in Mecca and indicates the direction of prayer.



Christus.... Hasseretti Issa
Christen.... Jåur.
Christi moder S:t maria.... Meriam.
Cithara..... Kara Dusånn. Tambura.
Crona...... Tatsch eller Sorgutsch
Creditiv.... Narmäh.
Carosse..... Hinta
Clawèr.... Chanun.
Cypress... Selvj.
Circkel.... Pärgäl.
Contant... Håssnüt.
Commedia.. Taklid.
nes contant..... Cailiféh hossnut
Commissole... Subun.
Capell... Ibadetgiaj
Contzel eller Member.
Cittwer eller Cedoar...... Surumbad.
Compagnie. Bajrak orta.
Castanier... Kåstanè.
Corporal.. Basch Eskj.
Campher... Cåffuhre

Figure 3. A page from Carling's dictionary
(Photo: National Library of Sweden)

Carling collects words that may have practical meanings, such as weather and militaria, and those related to Ottoman Muslim culture. He notes annual holidays such as *Ramasahn Bajram* and Kurbahm Bajram, and *Kurbahm Bajram*. His dictionary contains several terms related to both Islam and Christianity:

A Dieu	<*doalar*> (dualar) [to God] (*verbatim* [prayers])
Güd	<Allah>, <Jarabin>, <Tangreè> (Allah, Ya Rabbi, Tanrı) [God]
Bibel	<Teurat> 'Tevrat' (Tora) [Bible]
Christus	<Hayretti Isʃa> (Hayret-i Isa) [Christ]
Christen	<Gåur> (gâvur) [vulg. Infidel, non-Muslim]
Christi Moder, St. Maria	<Meriam> (Meryem Ana) [Mary, Miriam]

Sometimes, his explanations are incorrect, like the one about counting time: *Turkarnes åhrtal innevarande åhr 1713 blef 1125 sedan deras Mahomet blef död.*[32]

Listed words could be linked to the military camp, diplomacy, war, weapons, religion, food, drink and social life. They could also relate to socializing with women,[33] easily meeting the criteria of a true 'flesh and blood dictionary'.

The future analysis of all the entries in Carling's dictionary will probably confirm that we will find all 55 universal, conceptual, semantic primes and lexical universals according to the semantic theory created by Wierzbicka and her co-researchers.[34] Wierzbicka proves to be valid that Leibniz's assumption that if something does not exist as a self-understood entity, then it would be impossible to include it in a dictionary.[35]

Interesting lexical material can also be excerpted from the memoirs of Sven Agrell, a field priest who accompanied Charles XII in 1707–1713.[36]

Abgesant	<ältschi> (elçi) [envoy, ambassador]
Batttaile	<Dziängk> (cenk) [fight, combat]
Corporal	<Basch Eski> (başeski) [Janissary petty officer]
Bly	<kursium> (kurşun) [lead, bullet]

32 'The Turks' number of years, the current year 1713, became 1125 since their Mahomet died.' Mahomet died in 632, not 588. The Islamic calendar begins on the day and year that Muhammad left Mecca for Medina. According to the Gregorian calendar, this was in 622 AD.

33 Munthe (1935: 201–231) describes the expenses of Charles XII and his officers for extraordinary food and lavish gifts; however, it was not the responsibility of Field Commissioner Carling to account for them, but of his boss, the War Commissioner. Almost all 'Turkish courtesy phrases' are about emotions and erotic contact. For more on Constantinople as a place of freedom from Western European sexual conformity, see Mansel (1995: 176).

34 Wierzbicka 1996: 35–111.

35 Wierzbicka 2006: 29.

36 Widegren 2024. Widegren's work on contacts between the Swedes in Bender and the local population comprehensively discusses Agrell's field diaries.

Betzel	<uy̋em>, <baschlek>, <kanterma>, (*unknown equivalent*, başlık, kantarma) [spurred bit for a horse]
Appetit	<ästaim>, <jsteh> (iştah) [appetite, desire]
Aftonmåltid	<aksiam taam> (akşam taam) [evening meal]
Aprikoser	<serdale kajasi> (zerdali, kayısı) [wild apricot, apricot]
Anis	<anason> (anason) [anise]
Åhl	<jlan balek> (yılan balığı) [eel]
Bränwin	<rakia> (rakı) [raki]
Arsenicum	<Kisin otti bejas> (kızın otı beyaz?) [arsenic]
Gumma	<Aurat> (avrat) [woman]
Älskar dü	<Sewer ſen> (sever sen) [do you love]
Att avkläda	<esbabun brak/soinumak> (esvabın brak/soyunmak) [to undress]
Bröst	<göide><mämäh>‘ (gövde, meme) [breast generally or a female breast]
Atlast	<attlas> (atlas) [satin]

The notes on the pronunciation of Turkish words in these poems and dictionary entries are interesting from a linguistic point of view. Turkish words and phrases are written in the Latin alphabet with Swedish spelling. Carling created his transcription system by trying different ways of spelling, e.g. åhr (år) <gihl/ihl> in modern spelling ‘yıl’ [year]. Swedish orthography was not established then, but Carling skilfully found the equivalent of Turkish phonemes. For example, he wrote two consonants next to each other in order NOT to pronounce a single Swedish vowel as a long vowel: Swedish word ‘ask’ meaning a box, in Turkish ‘kutu’ in his spelling <kuttu> (kutu), reflects Turkish pronunciation accurately.

As I previously pointed out, Carling’s dictionary belongs to an important category of texts called transcription texts, meaning that they are written in alphabets other than Arabic.[37] Until the alphabetic reform of 1928, the Ottoman-Turkish language used the Arabic script based on consonants. Thanks to texts written with scripts written by non-Turks in Latin, Cyrillic, Armenian, and other alphabets containing vowels, we are able to reconstruct historical phonetics, phonology, and the morphophonology of the Turkish language. They are also significant for lexicological studies.

Carling probably had access to contemporary dictionaries that translated other European languages with Turkish, although the composition of his *Turkish Dictionary* and the arrangement of the entries seem to be his own.

---

37 Other noteworthy texts encompass a variety of genres, including grammars, vocabularies, phrasebooks, and translations of religious texts. Most often, they attest to the different Turkish dialects spoken throughout the former provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Their authors, who were usually not native Turkish speakers, have attempted to capture the phonetic shape of the language as they perceived it. The Arabic alphabet was used by Turks until 1928.

The instruction for the creation of the dictionary may have been given directly from Charles XII to Carling, but it is likely he would have been able to count on the help of other educated people who stayed in the Bender camp. Foremost is the king's interpreter, the Greek *dragoman* Amira.[38] He was possibly Carling's teacher, and if this was the case, it might explain why Carling presents the Greek alphabet with additions at the beginning of the dictionary.[39] Additionally, the Royal Chamberlain, Carsten Klingenstierna, who died in Bender in 1713, was recognised for his language skills and knew Turkish, as it is likely did the legation priest in Varnitsa, Magnus Aurivillius. And there were other interpreters in the camp, including Jean-Baptiste Savary as a person who redeemed three Swedish slave girls and took them to Demotika.[40]

It is perhaps no coincidence that the Swedish scholar and interpreter, Carl Aurivillius (1717–1786), with the same name as the previously mentioned clergyman residing in Bender, donated a copy of the Italian-Turkish dictionary of Giovanni Molino, published in 1641 to the Uppsala Library Carolina Rediviva (Święcicka 2020). Perhaps this same copy could have served his relative, Carsten in Bender, and could also have been used by Carling, who knew Italian to some extent. At the end of his dictionary, he included several pages of Italian-Turkish conversations, conversational phrases and dialogues, and *Obsservationi* (Observations), which provide a kind of statement about the Italian orthography for the notation of the Turkish sounds.[41]

Charles XII's forced stay in Ottoman Turkey had significant cultural and scientific consequences on Swedish thinking. Charles XII was accompanied by Carolinian officers and scholars, most of whom were clergy, as was common at the time. They devoted themselves to research and study. In 1710, the king sent three officers to the Orient on expeditions to explore the Holy Land and Egypt and copy landscapes and monuments (Ådahl 2015: 158–185).

Thus, the texts written by the Celsings enrich the collection of transcription texts written in the Latin script with a new variant—transcription texts based on Swedish characters. Carling's *Tursk Dictionair* further enriches this collection for much the same reason.

---

38 *Storia del soggiorno di Carlo XII in Turchia, scritta dal suo primo interprete Alessandro Amira*, e publicata da N. Iorga. *Historiska Handlingar* 19, appendix, 55–56, after Karlsson (1973); Tengberg (1953: 161–167); Amira's ancestry may explain why Carling presents the Greek names of numerals and names of months at the beginning of the dictionary. Amira was ordered to leave the king after the Sultan's decision to deport Charles XII.

39 Carling also includes *Turckisk alphabeth* correctly rendered in Arabic letters at the end of the Dictionary.

40 Dragomans in Bender are on Carling's payroll. Calculation, Benderska Dragomanerne, in *Likvidationer. Stora Nordiska kriget. 2. Avräkningskontoret*. Nr 3683; Widegren (2024: 24); Savary is mentioned in the biography of Johan Eriksson Ehrenskiöld, cavalry officer who tirelessly strive for loans for Charles XII ('Johan Eriksson Ehrenskiöld'. *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*. Accessed 1 October 2025. https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/16700).

41 There is still a lot of Carling's dictionary left to describe, such as conversations between fictional characters and grammatical sketches about the Turkish verb structure. I hope that the historical and linguistic material will be the subject of careful study in the future.

Carling did eventually return to Sweden, but the Great Power era was over, and times were difficult. By 1728, we know that Carling could no longer call himself *Holmensis*, i.e. Stockholmer, since he asked the Royal Chamber Collegium to receive the remaining *tractamentum*, as provincial inspector in Nyköping. By all accounts, he did not receive a positive response. He was also rejected on a new application to 'the Estates of the State to be granted liquidation and payment for his salary claims with the Royal Majesty, and the Crown from the year 1709, when he as War Commissioner was to be taken to Russian captivity, to the year 1719, when he received his farewell after many hardships'. There was no money for the military of the Great Power era: 'The deputation from the Chamber-Collegium [...] has not been found, that Commissioner Carling is entitled to any salary liquidation'.[42]

However, Carling did not give up and, in 1735, wrote a summary of his military deeds, entitled Memorial. He requested compensation for '34 years of service to the Royal Majesty and the Crown, and the many adventures he endured, difficult captivity and now later hardship and poverty'. This time his request was granted, and in 1739, Carling was given an annual salary of 50 daler.[43]

In the sweep of history, there seems some justice in that small stipend. We can say that Petter Carling was much more than a military man returning from a failed campaign. From the records of the age, we know that he was also the author of an early Swedish-Turkish dictionary from which linguists, and historians continue to draw from today.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Hugo Widegren for his technical review and insightful suggestions, which significantly enhanced the clarity of my article. I would also like to include my warm thanks to David Williams for proofreading the article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

Elżbieta Święcicka https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7670-8054

42 *Sveriges Ridderskaps och Adels Riksdags-Protokoll, nionde delen 1738–1739* (1887: 249).

43 '[...] upplästes Secrete Utskottets Extractum Protocolli angående Krigs-Commissarien Carlings dit remitterade ansökning att i stället för liquidation öfver des innestående lönings-fordringar antingen undfå en discretion eller tilräckelig årlig expectance-lön utur Ständernes Contoir; hållandes Secrete Utskottet före at, i anseende til Krigs-Commissariens i länglig tid med godt loford giorde tienster, des urståndne fångenskaper och åtskillige genomgångne svårigheter, honom kunde i Riksens Ständers Contoir tilläggas 50 dal. smt årlig expectance-lön' (*Sveriges Ridderskaps och Adels Riksdags-Protokoll från och med år 1719, Elfte delen 1738–1739*. 1887: 171).

References

Ådahl, Karin. 2015. ‘Expeditionerna till Orienten’ [‘The Expeditions to the Orient’]. In *Karl XII och svenskarna i Osmanska riket* [*Charles XII and the Swedes in the Ottoman Empire*], edited by Åsa Karlsson, Klas Kronberg, and Per Sandin, 158–185. Stockholm: Atlantis.

Djurberg, Vilhelm. 1913. ‘Om regementsfältskären Melchior Neuman och Karl XII:s blessyrer’ [‘About Regimental Field Surgeon Melchior Neuman and the Wounds of Charles XII’]. *Karolinska förbundets årsbok* (KFÅ) 1913: 105–106.

Dursteler, Eric R. 2006. *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Ericson Wolke, Lars. 2015. ‘Det storpolitiska spelet mellan Sverige, Ryssland och Höga porten’ [‘The Great Power Game between Sweden, Russia, and the Sublime Porte’]. In *Karl XII och svenskarna i Osmanska riket* [*Charles XII and the Swedes in the Ottoman Empire*], edited by Åsa Karlsson, Klas Kronberg, and Per Sandin, 20–43. Stockholm: Atlantis.

Gouridis, Athanassios I., and Per Sandin. 2015. ‘Karl XII i Demotika och Timurtasch’ [‘Charles XII in Demotika and Timurtasch’]. In *Karl XII och svenskarna i Osmanska riket* [*Charles XII and the Swedes in the Ottoman Empire*], edited by Åsa Karlsson, Klas Kronberg, and Per Sandin, 122–141. Stockholm: Atlantis.

Gurkan, Emrah S. 2015. ‘Mediating Boundaries: Mediterranean Go-Betweens and Cross-Confessional Diplomacy in Constantinople, 1560–1600’. *Journal of Modern History* 19: 107–128.

Karlsson, Gustav H. 1973. ‘Kring kalabaliken i Bender’ [‘About the Skirmish in Bender’]. *Karolinska förbundets årsbok* 1973: 29–62.

Karlsson, Åsa, Klas Kronberg, and Per Sandin, eds. *Karl XII och svenskarna i Osmanska riket* [*Charles XII and the Swedes in the Ottoman Empire*]. Stockholm: Atlantis.

Kronberg, Klas, Per Sandin, and Åsa Karlsson, eds. 2016. *When Sweden Was Ruled from the Ottoman Empire*. Stockholm: Armémuseum.

Kowalik, Janina. 1973. ‘Stanisław Leszczyński i Sverige’ [‘Stanislaw Leszczyński in Sweden’]. *Karolinska förbundets årsbok* 1973: 112–160.

Larsson, Olle. 2009. *Stormaktens sista krig: Sverige och stora nordiska kriget 1700–1721* [*The Great Power’s Last War: Sweden and the Great Nordic War, 1700–1721*]. Lund: Historiska media.

Lewis, Bernard. 2004. *From Babel to Dragomans: Interpreting the Middle East.* London: Orion Books Ltd.

Likvidationer. Stora Nordiska kriget. 2. Avräkningskontoret. Nr 3683. Stockholm: Swedish National Archives (Riksarkivet).

Liljegren, Bengt. 2015. ‘Kalabaliken i Varnitsa’ [‘The Skirmish in Varnitsa’]. In *Karl XII och svenskarna i Osmanska riket* [*Charles XII and the Swedes in the Ottoman Empire*], edited by Åsa Karlsson, Klas Kronberg, and Per Sandin, 88–105. Stockholm: Atlantis.

Mansel, Philip. 1995. *Constantinople: City of the World’s Desire, 1453–1924*. London: Penguin Books.

Munthe, Arne. 1935. ‘Karl XII i Turkiet. Några bidrag ur generalkrigskommissariatets räkenskaper’ [‘Charles XII in Turkey: Some Contributions from the Accounts of the General War Commissariat’]. *Karolinska förbundets årsbok* 1935: 201–231.

Palm, Thede. 1932–1933. ‘Gustaf Celsings dagbok’ [‘Gustaf Celsing’s Diary’]. *Karolinska förbundets årsbok* 1932–1933: 51–127.

Refik, Ahmet. 1922. ‘Karl Järnhuvud i Turkiet’ [‘Charles Ironhead in Turkey’]. Translated from Turkish by Karl Vilhelm Zetterstéen. *Le Monde Oriental* 16: 1–160.

Rosén, Jerker. 1938. ‘Från Poltava till Fredrikshald’ [‘From Poltava to Timurtasch’]. *Den svenska historien* 8: 58.

Sandin, Per. 2015. ‘Karl XII i Demotika och Timurtasch’ [‘Charles XII in Demotika and Timurtasch’]. In *Karl XII och svenskarna i Osmanska riket* [*Charles XII and the Swedes in the Ottoman Empire*], edited by Åsa Karlsson, Klas Kronberg, and Per Sandin, 88–105. Stockholm: Atlantis.

Savchuk, Yuri. 2015. ‘Den svensk-ukrainska alliansen’ [‘Charles XII and the Swedes in the Ottoman Empire’]. In *Karl XII och svenskarna i Osmanska riket* [*Charles XII and the Swedes in the Ottoman Empire*], edited by Åsa Karlsson, Klas Kronberg, and Per Sandin, 240–269. Stockholm: Atlantis.

Stille, Arthur. 1918. ‘Karl XII och Porten 1709–1714’ [‘Carles XII and the Sublime Porte’]. In *Karl XII : till 200-årsdagen av hans död* [*Charles XII: On the 200th Anniversary of His Death*], edited by Samuel E. Bring, 339–412. Stockholm: Norstedt.

Sveriges Ridderskaps och Adels Riksdags-Protokoll, nionde delen 1738–1739. Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.

Sveriges Ridderskaps och Adels Riksdags-Protokoll från och med år 1719, Elfte delen 1738–1739. 13 mars 1739. Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.

Święcicka, Elżbieta. 1997. ‘Den diplomatiska trafiken mellan Sverige, Tatariet och Osmanska riket, från Gustav Vasas tid till Karl XII’ [‘The Diplomatic Traffic between Sweden, Tataria and the Ottoman Empire, from the Time of Gustav Vasa to Charles XII’]. In *Den nordiska mosaiken: språk- och kulturmöten i gammal tid och i våra dagar: Humanistdagarna vid Uppsala universitet 1997*, edited by Rut Boström Andersson, 291–305. Uppsala: Uppsala universitet.

Święcicka, Elżbieta. 2002. ‘The Diplomatic Letters by Crimean Keräy Ladies to the Swedish Royal House’. *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 55 (1): 57–90.

Święcicka, Elżbieta. 2015. ‘Preliminary Notes on Linguistic Documents from the von Celsings’ Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Collection’. In *Words and Dictionaries: A Festschrift for Professor Stanisław Stachowski on the Occasion of His 85th Birthday*, edited by Elżbieta Mańczak-Wohlfeld and Barbara Podolak, 341–353. Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press.

Święcicka, Elżbieta. 2020. *Dictionary of Italian-Turkish Language (1641) by Giovanni Molino: Transcripted, Reversed, and Annotated.* Edited by Elżbieta Święcicka. Studien zur Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur der Turkvölker 23. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Tengberg, Eric. 1953. *Från Poltava till Bender. En studie i Karl XII:s turkiska politik 1709–1713*. Lund: Carl Bloms Boktryckeri.

Tursk Dictionair skrifwin vid af P. Carling, Holmensis in Suecia. Petter Carling. Strängnäs: Rogge Library, National Library of Sweden.

Widegren, Hugo. 2024. ‘The Friendly Turk: Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire by Swedes in Bender during the Great Northern War’. MA Thesis, Stockholm: Stockholm University.

Wierzbicka, Anna. 1996. ‘A Survey of Semantic Primitives’. In *Semantics: Primes and Universals,* edited by Anna Wierzbicka, 35–111. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wierzbicka, Anna. 2006. *Meaning and Culture*. Oxford: University Press.

Wikander, Johan G. 1922. *Översikt över Sveriges Krig under 1700-talet*. Stockholm: Militärlitteraturföreningens Förlag.

Zetterstéen, Karl Wilhelm. 1952. ‘De krimska tatarernas diplomatiska korrespondens med den svenske regeringen’ [‘The Diplomatic Correspondence of the Crimean Tatars with the Swedish Government’]. *Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskaps-Samfundet i Uppsala Årsbok* 1952: 7–16.

FOLIA ORIENTALIA—BIBLIOTHECA 2 (2025)
DOI 10.24425/for.2025.156877

Mirosław Michalak
University of Warsaw, Poland | miroslaw.michalak@uw.edu.pl

Reconsidering a Paragraph of the Pahlavi *Vidēvdād* and Its Translation

Abstract This study offers a detailed re-examination of a passage from the second fargard of the Pahlavi *Vidēvdād* (Vd. 2.6), which recounts the episode of Yima receiving two mysterious implements from Ahura Mazda. The paper analyses the Avestan and Middle Persian terminology (*suβrā-*, *aštrā-*, *sūrāgōmand*, *aštar*), the interpretative challenges they pose, and their various renderings in past scholarship. It argues that the aforementioned passage of the *Vīdēvdād* has been frequently misinterpreted due to insufficient attention to the Middle Persian *zand* and—in one case—to the heterographic structure of the Pahlavi text. The study identifies the term mtl'k as an overlooked aramaeogram corresponding to *pēsīdag* ('gilt, adorned'), thus clarifying the phrase *pēsīdag dastag* ('with a gilt handle'). Drawing on philological, textual, and comparative evidence, the article concludes that the two objects in question should be interpreted not as weapons or musical instruments but as pastoral tools—specifically, a goad and a whip—fitting Yima's function as a herdsman-king. The analysis also situates the narrative within broader Iranian ritual and mythological traditions, including parallels with Herodotus' account of Xerxes' ritual acts at the Hellespont.

Keywords Avestan, Middle Persian, *Vidēvdād*, *zand*, Yima, aramaeograms, Zoroastrian literature, textual criticism

1 Introduction

The Pahlavi literature had been written, commented and shared for a long period of time. After collapse of the Sasanian Empire, however, it was gradually becoming limited to the Zoroastrian community separated from the Islamic mainstream. The situation had deteriorated partly due to the loss of greater part of the written Pahlavi legacy during early Islamic era and, on the other hand, due to new circumstances of the Iranian people who by the 9th and 10th century found their new cultural identity within the Caliphate. From that point onward, the Pahlavi literature and its language became that of a minority.[1] Therefore, Zoroastrian leaders of the Islamic era resorted to Pahlavi in their literary activity not in order to communicate with the common

[1] For overviews of the Middle Persian literature see Tavadia (1956); Boyce (1968); Klíma (1968); Cereti (2009); Macuch (2009); Andrés-Toledo (2015); Daryaee (2018).

© 2025 The Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

lore of Iranian past—actually, it was an effort to preserve the communal tradition of Zoroastrianism. The result is the limited textual corpus which has been preserved and is available today. It is almost entirely religious, with vocabulary focused on theology, rituals, religious law, cosmogony, eschatology, myths. Therefore, it lacks richness and diversity of some other dead languages like Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit.

The major part of Zoroastrian textual corpus consists of Middle Persian translations from Avestan, in many cases preserving the Avestan grammatical or lexical features, including phrases, collocations, loanwords, calques, and Pahlavi transcriptions of Avestan words. The unique phenomenon of intertextual relation between Avestan and its Middle Persian translations and commentaries is attracting growing interest of scholars.[2]

As some parts of the Avesta are known only through its Pahlavi translation, hence there is no opportunity of taking advantage of the original text in order to establish the correct shape or meaning of words. And, of course, their context. Reconstruction of large spectre of various contexts of Middle Persian is only partially possible, given that they are largely dependent on older contexts of the Avesta which are also obscure. Dependence on Avestan source material—particularly in relation to Middle Persian translations of Avestan texts—carries significant implications for both researchers and translators. This paper focuses on the textual situation in a section of the second *fargard* of the *Pahlavi Vidēvdād*, which presents the story of Yima in Middle Persian translation accompanied by the Avestan text and explanatory glosses. Accordingly, all direct source references will pertain to the Middle Persian text. The Avestan version will be cited solely for illustrative purpose and to preserve the coherence of the argument. Textual-critical details, however, will not be addressed. Some scholarly interpretations and findings concerning the meaning of selected Avestan terms and their renderings in academic studies and lexicons will also be reported. Both manuscripts and printed editions of the *Pahlavi Vidēvdād*—primarily the 2014 edition by Moazami (2014) whose work is based on manuscripts (mainly K1 and L4) and partly on Jamasp's edition—will be consulted. Other editions will be referenced only occasionally, chiefly for supplementary or contextual purposes.

2 The text and its context

The *Vidēvdād* (*Vendīdād*) is among the most extensively studied texts in the Avestan corpus. Several factors contribute to this. Most notably, it is the only part of the Avesta that has been preserved nearly in full as it was edited during the Sasanian period. What survives is not only the Avestan text itself but also a Middle Persian translation and commentary, as well as a summary in Book VIII of the *Dēnkard*.

Furthermore, the *Vidēvdād* belongs to the category of legal Avestan texts (*dādīg*), which are of enduring importance for linguistic, doctrinal, and historical research. It also contains rare narrative material, which is particularly valuable for scholars

2 Among others Josephson (1997); Cantera (2004); Zeini (2020).

studying Iranian mythology and epic traditions. As a result, the *Vidēvdād* has drawn considerable scholarly attention, leading to numerous editions, translations, and glossaries (Sanjana 1895; N.M. Kanga 1900; Jamasp 1907; Anklesaria 1949; Kapadia 1953; Moazami 2014; Andrés-Toledo 2016; Redard 2021). The story of Yima, which forms the second *fargard* of the *Vidēvdād*, is a significant narrative episode in the Avesta and has long attracted the interest of scholars. Consequently, this particular chapter has been published and translated separately on many occasions—in both its Avestan and Middle Persian forms, or in one version alone—often independently of full editions of the *Vidēvdād* (Moghaddam 1363; Moazami 2002; Bāgheri Hasan Kiādeh and Rouholamini Hoseini 1393; Molāyi 1402).

One of the many challenges encountered by researchers and translators appears in the brief sixth paragraph (Vd. 2.6), which consists essentially of a single sentence:

> 2.6 (A) *āat̰ hē zaiia frabarəm azəm yō ahurō mazdā̊* (B) *suβrąm zaranaēnīm aštrąmca zaraniiō.paēsim* (Geldner 1896: 7–8)
>
> 2.6 (A) ADYN’ OL OLE zdȳ pr’č YBLWN-t L MNW ’whrmẕd HWE-m (B) swl’k’wmnd ZHBA-yn’ W ’štl-č Y ZHBA-yn’ psyd [*matl’k dstk’][3]
>
> 2.6 (A) *ēg ō ōy zay frāz burd man kē ohrmazd ham* (B) *sūrāgōmand zarrēn ud aštar-iz ī zarrēn-pēsīd [*mutallā dastag]* (Moazami 2014: 48)[4]
>
> 2.6 (A) Then I who am Ohrmazd, brought him the tool, (B) a *golden pick and a goad adorned with gold [having a *gilt handle] (Moazami 2014: 48).

3 Lexical evidence and interpretative problems

The main difficulty concerns two Avestan terms—*suβrā-* and *aštrā-*—along with their Middle Persian equivalents *sūrāgōmand* (swl’k’wmnd) and *aštar* (’štr). While we can now read, transliterate, and vocalize these words without issue, their precise meanings remain uncertain. We can infer their function from the context: Yima uses them in actions described in the text, and they are noted for being made of gold or gilded (*zarrēn* and *zarrēn-pēsīd*), which suggests they may be royal insignia. However, their

---

3 Manuscripts of Pahl.Vd.: L4 (4600), f13r-f13v; MI3 (4615), f14r-f14v: pr’č YBLWN-x_1; F10 (4670), f14r: pr’č YBLWN-x_1, mwtl’k bstk (corrected into mwtl’k dstk), NP gloss on the margin: mdr’k, the text abounds in NP glosses; G28 (4680), f11r: swl’k ’wmnd (written separately) Y zdȳ ZHBA-yn’, few NP glosses; T44 (4700), f16r: swl’k ’wmnd (written separately) Y ZHBA-yn’, the text regularly accompanied by NP glosses between the lines; G34 (4710), f18r: pr’č YBLW N T’’ LMNW (written in a confusing manner), swl’k ’wmnd (written separately, with a stroke over the letter ‘l’ as a pronunciation guide), mt-l’k dst (written with a hyphen, missing the ending letter ‘k’), the text abounds in NP glosses; B1 (4711), f17v: pr’č YBLWN-x_1, NP glosses; Bh11 (4712), f21r. All these manuscripts are available on-line at *Avestan Digital Archive.* Accessed 22 September 2025. https://ada.geschkult.fu-berlin.de. See also *The Zoroastrian Middle Persian Digital Corpus and Dictionary*. https://www.mpcorpus.org. PV-K1–02, Section 2.6, Sentence 135; Ms. of the Pahl.Vd. dated 1859, Columbia University N.Y., Cat. No. X892.5Av3 S4, f10v. Accessed 22 September 2025. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nnc2.ark:/13960/t1ph1c67f&seq=1.

4 Moazami’s transcription has been slightly modified here. I have added *ī* after *aštar-iz* in accordance with the manuscripts.

exact use is still unclear. The generic term used to describe them is ambiguous: the Avestan noun *zaya-* and its Middle Persian counterpart *zay* can mean either tool or weapon (Bartholomae 1904: 1666).[5] In the first part of the narrative—where Yima receives authority from Ahura Mazda to care for creation—these objects seem to be used to expand the earth three times to accommodate a growing population (Vd. 2.10, 14, 18). But the verbs describing their use (e.g., to pierce, strike, or rub the earth) are vague and open to interpretation. In the second part of the story, during the onset of a deadly winter, one of the items (*suβrā- / sūrāgōmand*) is mentioned twice: once in connection with sealing a protective shelter (MP *war*), and once with bringing inhabitants into it (Vd. 2.30, 38). However, the syntax here is ambiguous and allows multiple readings.[6]

Because the *Vidēvdād* has been translated many times, a variety of interpretations of these terms exist. The Avestan *suβrā-* has been translated as spear,[7] seal, signet ring,[8] ring,[9] arrow,[10] notch or ploughshare,[11] pick or spike,[12] trumpet, horn[13] or just implement.[14] The Middle Persian *sūrāgōmand* is usually rendered as crown or ring,[15] ring,[16] hollow object.[17] Its literal meaning in *zand*—having a hole or perforated—suggests it could be a wreath, diadem, ring, signet, or even a musical instrument (flute, horn). However, scholars still disagree on the exact nature and meaning of this object.

A similar issue arises with the second object bestowed upon Yima by Ahura Mazda. However, the relationship between the Avestan term *aštrā-* and its Middle Persian counterpart *aštar* differs remarkably from that between *suβrā-* and its translation as *sūrāgōmand*. In this case, we are dealing with a straightforward linguistic transposition from Avestan to Middle Persian, involving morphological adaptation of the lexeme to suit the structure of the target language.[18] This would appear to

5 Cf. Reichelt (1911: 272). For Middle Persian see MacKenzie (1986: 98).

6 Mss. of Pahl.Vd.: L4 (4600), f22r, f25r; MI3 (4615), f23v, 27r; F10 (4670), f23v, f27r; G28 (4680), f19r, f22r; T44 (4700), f26r, f29v; G34 (4710), f28r, 32r; B1 (4711), f30r-f30v, 35r; Bh11 (4712), f39v, f44v-f45r; PV-K1–02, Sec. 2.30, Sent. 235, Sec. 2.38, Sent. 264—*MPDC*; Pahl.Vd. 1859 Columbia, f17v, f20r-f20v. See also Molāyi (1402: 78–79).

7 ‘eine goldene Lanze’ (Spiegel 1852: 71, 72).

8 ‘un sceau d’or’ (Darmesteter 1892 2: 21, 22, 23); ‘a golden ring’ (Darmesteter 1880 I: 12, 13, 14, 15).

9 ‘anneau’ (Christensen 1934: 15, 16, 46); ‘bague’ (Christensen 1934: 17, 18).

10 ‘Pfeil’ (Bartholomae 1904: 1583); ‘Pfeil’ (Wolff 1910: 320, 321); ‘arrow’ (Reichelt 1911: 139, 269).

11 ‘*sufār / sufāl be ma’ni-ye surāx va dahān-e tir yā “sopār”: āhan-e sar tiz barā-ye šiyār kardan-e zamin*’ (Moghaddam 1363: 67); ‘*sufār*’ (Moghaddam 1363: 91, 92, 93, 94).

12 ‘pick’ (Moazami 2014: 49, 51, 53); ‘*sok-e zarrin*’ (Molāyi 1402: 30, 33, 37, 41).

13 ‘le cor’ (Lecoq 2017: 284, 876, 877, 878, 881, 883).

14 K.E. Kanga 1900: 528–529.

15 ‘a crown (or a ring)’ (N.M. Kanga 1900: 17); ‘ring’ (N.M. Kanga 1900: 18, 19).

16 ‘lit. with a hole; hence, a ring’ (Jamasp 1907 2: 221).

17 ‘hollow (-implement)’ (Anklesaria 1949: 18, 20, 22, 24); ‘hollow golden <instrument>’ (Moazami 2002: 66, 67, 68, 70, 72).

18 It is noteworthy that a similar practice is commonly employed by contemporary translators of Middle Persian texts into New Persian (Kłagisz 2015).

make the matter simpler. Yet even here, the precise meaning and function of the object remain ambiguous. The Avestan term *aštrā-* has been variously interpreted as: spike,[19] sword,[20] poniard,[21] whip, horsewhip, knout,[22] whip,[23] an oxgoad or whip,[24] scourge,[25] goad.[26] Translators of the Middle Persian *zand* largely align with these, offering similar renderings such as: dagger, sword, javelin, poniard, and whip.[27]

As evident, interpretations and translations of both terms vary, and none can be regarded as entirely definitive. Nevertheless, some stand out as particularly accurate and convincing. Below are a few of the most compelling interpretations.

H.W. Bailey (1943: 219–224) offers an in-depth analysis of the possible meanings of both terms, drawing on the linguistic context to investigate the functions their referents may have served. The sentence quoted above from Vd. 2.6 serves merely as a starting point—a simple statement not devoid of ambiguity. Hence the necessity of turning to a more explicit context, which Bailey finds in Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18. In these sections, the two objects received by Yima from Ahura Mazda are accompanied by the verbs *aiβifšuuat̰* and *sifat̰*, indicating actions performed with their aid. These actions relate to driving cattle and are translated here respectively as 'to drive' and 'to strike' (*hō imąm ząm aiβifšuuat̰ suβriia zaranaēniia auui dim sifat̰ aštraiia* 'He drove on this earth with the golden suwra, he struck upon her with the whip' Vd. 2.10) (Bailey 1943: 227).[28] This interpretation is justified by the fact that one of Yima's roles—though largely overshadowed in extant narratives by his kingship—was that of a herdsman. However, in the mentioned paragraphs, it is not cattle but the personified earth, Spənta Ārmaiti, that is urged three times by means of both instruments to exhibit a specific behavior: the expansion of her surface (Bailey 1943: 219–221). On the other hand, in Vd. 2.30 and 38, *suβrā-*, according to Bailey, was used by Yima to drive the seed of men and women (also personified) into the interior of the *var*. In this case, Bailey assumes that the form *varəfšuua*, which elsewhere in Vd. 2 consistently appears as a locative noun, should instead be understood as a verb meaning 'to drive (in)'. To support this reading, he engages in a kind of deconstruction and then reconstruction

---

19 'Stachel' (Spiegel 1852: 71, 72).

20 'une épée' (Darmesteter 1892 2: 21, 22, 23); 'a poniard' (Darmesteter 1880: 12, 13, 14,15).

21 'a dagger, a poniard' (K.E. Kanga 1900: 69).

22 'Geisel, Peitsche, Knute' (Bartholomae 1904: 263).

23 'a whip used in connection with *Sraosho-charana* in religious castigation for driving away noxious animals' (K.E. Kanga 1900: 69); 'Peitsche' (Wolff 1910: 320, 321); 'whip' (Reichelt 1911: 139); 'goad, whip' (Reichelt 1911: 220).

24 '*gavāz (šallāgh?)*' (Moghaddam 1363: 47); '*aštar*' (Moghaddam 1363: 91, 92, 93, 94).

25 '*tāzyāne*' (Molāyi 1402: 30, 33, 37, 41).

26 'aiguillon' (Christensen 1934: 15, 16, 46); 'the goad' (Moazami 2002: 66, 67); 'goad' (Moazami 2014: 49, 51, 53:); 'aiguillon' (Lecoq 2017: 284, 876, 877, 878).

27 'a sword (or poniard)'; 'poniard' (N.M. Kanga 1900: 18, 19); 'dagger, sword, javelin, poniard' (Jamasp 1907 2: 34); 'poniard' (Anklesaria 1949: 18, 20, 22, 24:); (i) 'dagger, sword, poniard, a weapon'; (ii) 'a whip used with sraocha-charana i.e. an implement for bodily anguish and torture' (Kapadia 1953: 249).

28 I have changed Bailey's transcription of Avestan in order to avoid inconsistency and incompatibility with other quotations from the Avesta.

of the text (Bailey 1943: 222–224). While the argument in relation to Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18 is convincing, the construction referring to Vd. 2.30 and 38 remains debatable. Nonetheless, the translation of *suβrā-* as 'goad' is well substantiated. As for the term *aštrā-*, Bailey considers the matter definitively resolved in favor of the meaning whip (Bailey 1943: 220–221). This interpretation is now widely accepted, and MacKenzie (1986: 13) also provides this meaning in his dictionary.

J. Kellens follows a similar line of inquiry in his 1974 publication on Avestan roots, where he analyzes the term *varəfšuua*. He likewise argues that in Vd. 2.30 and 38 the term should be understood as a verbal form. However, he also points out certain inconsistencies and, at times, the arbitrary nature of Bailey's interpretations (Kellens 1974: 358–361). With regard to the term *suβrā-*, Kellens accepts Bailey's interpretation as the stick used to drive cattle: 'le bâton (à mener le bétail)'. The term *aštrā-*, on the other hand, is rendered by Kellens alternately as whip ('le fouet'), following Bailey's reading, and as spear ('la pique') (Kellens 1974: 195, 320, 358 n. 1). In his later works, however, Kellens revised his position and adopted the interpretation proposed by J. Duchesne-Guillemin, who translates *suβrā-* as horn ('le cor') (Kellens 1984: 270; Kellens 1988: 329, 332. n. 1).[29]

The first scholar to propose that the term *suβrā-* might refer to a musical instrument was the Iranian researcher Š. Hedāyati. In a 1971 (Hedāyati 1349) article devoted entirely to the terms *suβrā-* and *aštrā-*, he presents arguments identifying *suβrā- / sūrāgōmand* as a horn (*nafir*, *gāvdom*). Beyond extensive textual analysis drawn from the Avestan corpus—including the use of specific verbs that describe the function of the object—Hedāyati also cites evidence from the *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*. In this text, there is an allusion to Yima's *sūrāgōmand* in the context of Sōšyāns using the *gāwdumb* to resurrect the dead. He further draws a parallel with Indian mythology, where Yama is described as possessing a reed flute (Hedāyati 1349: 116). Additionally, Hedāyati turns to the *zand* tradition, where the verb *suft*, used in Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18, is glossed in Middle Persian by the compound *frōd garzīd* (Hedāyati 1349: 117; Jamasp 1907 1: 27–28). The verb *garzīdan*, meaning to complain or to lament, is interpreted by Hedāyati as referring to the production of sound (*nāle*, *sedā*) by a musical instrument, such as a horn (Hedāyati 1349: 117). A central element of his argument is based on the verb *garzīdan*, which appears in a gloss accompanying the *zand* text. However, this line of reasoning is problematic. The word in question appears in this form in the edition by H. Jamasp, which serves as the textual foundation for Hedāyati's analysis (Jamasp 1907 1: 563). The verb, however, although attested in the extant manuscripts of the *Pahlavi Vidēvdād* (including Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18) in two spellings glčyt and klčyt,[30] beyond any doubt has another meaning in this context. As a Pahlavi gloss to a passage in Vd. 18.4 suggests, *garzīdan* or *karzīdan* stands

---

[29] Cf. Duchesne-Guillemin (1979: 539–549).

[30] Mss. of Pahl.Vd.: L4 (4600), f15v; Bh11 (4712), f23r. *Avestan Digital Archive*; Pahl.Vd. 1859 Columbia, f12v.

here for the act of wielding. The whole sentence says: *aštar mārγen kū ōh garzēd ast kē ēdōn gowēd ay ōh wizārēd anaybyāst pad dēn* ('A whip for killing snakes which he, ungirdled in Dēn, is said to wave (?) or—according to some—to wield').[31] In some manuscripts the corresponding verb appearing in Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18, is not glčyt and klčyt but dlyt', representing the verb *darīd* (*darīdan*—to tear down or to rend).[32] The same reading is found in the editions by Sanjana (1895: 14–15, 18), Anklesaria (1949: 20), N.M. Kanga (1900), and Moazami.[33] The form '*darīdan*' should therefore be considered relevant for this passage. This assumption significantly alters the interpretative context of Hedāyati's reasoning.

With regard to the noun *aštrā-*, Hedāyati argues that although the term appears elsewhere in the *Vidēvdād*—specifically in the compound *aspahe-aštrā*—as a designation for an instrument of punishment (whip), this does not exclude the possibility that in the second *fargard*, it may serve a different function, namely, that of a musical instrument (Hedāyati 1349: 108, 115, 118–119). In this context, he unequivocally claims that *aštrā-* refers to a type of musical instrument. Consequently, both objects bestowed upon Yima are understood as signaling devices, intended to summon or direct nomadic communities, particularly during their migrations.

However, this interpretation is built on weak foundations, relying almost entirely on conjecture, as no primary sources explicitly support such a reading of the term (Hedāyati 1349: 117–120). Hedāyati's hypothesis is later echoed by M. Bahār, who reinforces the idea of *suβrā-* as a sound-producing horn by referencing a passage from the *Bundahišn*. In chapter XXIV of that text, during the description of the mythical three-legged donkey emerging from the sea *Frāxkard*, there is a mention of its golden horn, referred to as *sūrāgōmand* (Bahār 1362: 178–179).[34] Another Iranian scholar, A. Tafazzoli (1355: 48–50), in 1976 expanded upon the interpretations of his predecessors by introducing new textual evidence from Book IX of the *Dēnkard* and from al-Muqaddasī's treatise *Kitāb al-badʾ wa-l-tārīḫ*. These sources refer to a magical object described in Middle Persian as *sūrāgōmand ī zarrēn* and in Arabic as *mašāra wa-hiya minfaḫa min ḏahab*—a golden wind instrument allegedly used by Zahhāk to lure individuals who possessed attractive young women or desirable goods. In the Arabic text, the verb *nafaḫa* (to blow) is employed, prompting Tafazzoli to interpret Zahhāk's object as a wind instrument, most plausibly a horn. Nevertheless, in the conclusion of his article, Tafazzoli expresses caution. He argues that the Avestan term *suβrā-* should not

31 Mss. of Pahl.Vd.: L4 (4600), f243v; K1 (4610), f196r; F10 (4670), f254r; G28 (4680), f234v; T44 (4700), f283r; G34 (4710), f255v; B1 (4711), f360r; Bh11 (4712), f208v—*Avestan Digital Archive*; PV-K1–02, Sec. 18.4, Sen. 2979—*MPDC*; Pahl.Vd. 1859 Columbia, f206r. For the meaning, etymology and use of the verb *wizārīdan* see Mansuri (1384: 491).

32 Mss. of Pahl.Vd.: G28 (4680), f13r—*Avestan Digital Archive*; PV-K1–02, Sec. 2.10, Sen. 146, Sec. 2.14, Sen. 161, Sec. 2.18, Sen. 175.

33 '*kū-š abar pad frōd-darīd*' (Moazami 2002: 59); '*kū-š abar frōd-darīd*' (Moazami 2002: 60); 'he tore it down' (Moazami 2002:67, 68); Moazami (2014: 50, 51, 52, 53).

34 '*ān ēk srū zarrēn homānāg sūrāgōmand u-š hazār srū abārig aziš rust ēstēd*' (Pakzad 2005: 271 [24d.15]).

be linked to any kind of sound-producing instrument, noting that such associations only appear in the writings of later translators and commentators of the Avesta, who were likely influenced by contemporary legends attributing a miraculous horn to Yima (Tafazzoli 1355: 49). This conclusion is challenged by Duchesne-Guillemin (1979: 539–549), who presents an extensive argument in favor of interpreting the object as a horn. Like Hedāyati, he considers it highly plausible that the instrument used by the Avestan Yima is related to the term *ṣūr*, mentioned multiple times in the Quran, which denotes the horn whose sound will summon the dead at the end of time for the final judgment. Moreover, Duchesne-Guillemin argues that the Quranic *ṣūr* is a direct borrowing from the theoretical Middle Persian term *sūr*, itself ultimately derived from the Avestan *suβrā-* with the same meaning (Hedāyati 1349: 121–122; Duchesne-Guillemin 1979: 545–549). He reviews the arguments put forth by the three aforementioned Iranian scholars and engages with the primary sources they cite, adding further evidence from the Middle Persian text *Husraw ī Kawādān ud rēdag-ē*, where the name of a musical instrument appears in the form swl'cyk (Azarnouche 2013: 56 [text § 62], 142 [comments]).[35] Duchesne-Guillemin reads this as *sūrācīk* and proposes linking this name, along with *sūrāgōmand*, to the Avestan *suβrā-*, the Sanskrit root *śumbhati*, and the Persian verb *suftan* (to pierce).[36] Lecoq also translates *suβrā-* as horn, although he offers no justification for this choice other than the fact that, like the goad, it belongs to the standard toolkit of a herdsman—hence his view of Yima as a shepherd-king.[37] He translates *aštrā-* as goad but also allows for the alternative translation—whip. He interprets it as an object used in combat, but also as a tool employed by priests (*āθrauuan*) and for the administration of punishment.[38]

4 Remarks on the presented interpretations

The analyses presented above reveal two distinct methodological approaches. The first, exemplified by Bailey and Kellens, centers exclusively on the Avestan text, deliberately disregarding the Middle Persian *zand*, which—allegedly being the product of a misinterpretation of the original Avestan by its translators—is considered to obscure rather than clarify the meaning (Bailey 1943: 222; Kellens 1984: 358 n. 1). This idea has been entirely dismissed by modern scholarship, particularly due to the recent research made by J. Josephson (1997: 153–165), A. Cantera (2004: 3–13), and A. Zeini (2020: 291). Subsequently, the *zand* is no more deemed in opposition to the 'genuine' Avesta (*abestāg*) but is perceived as its inseparable and valuable part.

35 The editor translates the Pahlavi term *sūrāzīg-srāy* 'le joueur de flûte de fête (?)' and does not make any decisive conclusion concerning its meaning and etymology.

36 Duchesne–Guillemin (1979: 544) The Indo-Iranian root 'śumbh-' parallel to Middle and New Persian '*sumb-*'/'*suft-*' was noticed by Bailey (1943: 221). Cf. Kellens (1974: 358 n. 1); Mansuri (1384: 392–393).

37 'Yima est donc un rois pasteur' (Lecoq 2017: 876 n. 6). Kellens (1984: 269–272) categorically rejects the interpretation of Yima as a royal figure, a view most notably advanced by Christensen.

38 '"aiguillon" ou "fouet", utilisé à la guerre (voir Yt. 10, 113), c'est aussi un instrument de l'*āθravan* (V. 14, 8; et du faux *āθravan*, V. 18, 4) et un châtiment (V. 3, 36 note; 4, 11, etc.)' (Lecoq 2017: 876 n. 6).

The second approach, advocated chiefly by Hedāyati, Bahār, and Duchesne--Guillemin, incorporates the *zand* into the interpretative process, treating the Middle Persian translation as a valuable clue in resolving the semantic ambiguities of the two terms (Hedāyati 1349: 116–117; Bahār 1362: 178). While in the broader context of Middle Persian translation studies the second approach may seem inherently more pertinent, in this specific case, the insights of Avestan scholars prove instrumental in accurately interpreting the *zand*. At the same time, the *zand* certainly can shed light on uncertainties concerning the meaning of individual lexemes as well as the cultural codes embedded in the text.

The hypotheses outlined above, though more persuasive and better substantiated than alternative, mostly outdated interpretations, are not without their shortcomings. In the arguments put forward by Bailey and Kellens, one notable point of contention lies in their inconsistent treatment of the lexeme *varəfšuua*—interpreted in some instances as a noun, and in others as a verb. Additionally, Kellens offers two divergent translations for the term *aštrā* ('le fouet' and 'la pique'), which may raise concerns regarding conceptual coherence. Nevertheless, the evidence presented by both scholars remains generally credible and methodologically sound.

In contrast, the interpretations proposed by Hedāyati and Bahār warrant attention for their reliance solely on the Middle Persian *zand*, particularly in support of their thesis that the item in question was a musical instrument. Duchesne-Guillemin, on the other hand, acknowledges that according to the prevailing scholarly opinion, the Avestan *suβrā-* should have yielded **subr* or **surb*, by analogy with *abra-* > *abr* ('cloud'). Nevertheless, he proposes an alternative sequence of phonetic transformations: *suβr* > *suwr* > *sūr*, supporting his view with the alleged shift from *gabr* to *gawr* (Duchesne-Guillemin 1979: 544). This argument, however, has significant weaknesses.

First, the proposed phonetic sequence lacks any attestation in the sources, and no analogous developments are known that might lend it credibility. Second, the forms *gabr* and *gawr* are not linked by a diachronic relationship; rather, they coexist in New Persian, with the latter representing merely a phonetic variant of the former (Shaki 2000). Duchesne-Guillemin also interprets the New Persian word *sornā* (or *sornāy*) as a compound *sūr-nāy*. Rejecting the explanation found in traditional Persian lexicography—according to which the term refers to a wind instrument used to enhance festive gatherings—he argues that the word should be understood as a combination of trumpet and flute, with *sūr* representing a reflex of the Avestan *suβrā-*.[39] However, no such meaning of *sūr* is attested in either Middle Persian or New Persian. In both languages, the word refers exclusively to a 'banquet' or 'feast'. The entire line of reasoning rests on the a priori assumption that *suβrā-* denoted a musical instrument. This hypothesis draws, in part, on Indian tradition, in which Yama is described as the possessor of a flute. In that tradition, Yama is above all a royal figure, whereas in the Avestan context, his counterpart Yima has an equally important pastoral function

39 'un instrument combinant la trompette et la flûte, le *sūr* et le *nāy*: *sūrnāy*' (Duchesne-Guillemin 1979: 544).

(Bailey 1943: 220–221). Duchesne-Guillemin also appeals to this pastoral dimension, arguing that a shepherd's natural attribute would be a wind instrument, such as a pipe or horn.[40] His argument further relies on a passage from a *zand* text, and several analogies drawn from later Middle Persian and Arabic sources. Apart from *Husraw ī Kawādān ud rēdag-ē*, these are predominantly late sources such as the *Dēnkard* and the *Wizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*. Moreover, many of the lexemes he invokes to support his claims originate in New Persian and cannot plausibly be connected to the Avestan language.

5 Functional interpretation and comparative perspective

There remain, of course, other contexts that have yet to be examined in relation to the *fargard* of the *Vidēvdād* under discussion. A particularly compelling analogy is provided by Herodotus, who in his account of Xerxes' army crossing the Hellespont (Dardanelles), describes the Persian king's command to have the sea whipped as punishment for a storm that had destroyed the bridge constructed by the Persians across the strait (Herodotus 2015: 7.35). T. Daryaee (2016: 4–9) drew attention to this passage from Herodotus, arguing that the conduct of the Persian King of Kings described here is a deliberate repetition of Yima's gesture, assuming Xerxes' familiarity with the mythological narrative motifs of the Avesta. Daryaee focuses on the use of the whip as an instrument of control, in the sense in which Yima employs it upon the earth to enforce his will (Daryaee 2016: 6). The symbolic meaning of this ritual was evidently lost on the Greeks. This is reflected in Aeschylus' *Persians*, where the act is portrayed as a manifestation of youthful arrogance, a sacrilegious offense against the sanctity of the Hellespont, and a hubristic belief that a mortal could exercise dominion over all the gods, including Poseidon himself (Aeschylus 1903: 743–750).[41] The incident is thus interpreted as an expression of hubris—the excessive pride and overreach characteristic of Xerxes in Greek moral and literary tradition. Daryaee also draws attention to this, making an analogy to a similar trait in the figure of Yima, who as a result of his improper conduct, loses his royal glory and power (Daryaee 2016: 7).

It should be noted, however, that the whipping was accompanied by the symbolic act of chaining of the waters and their branding by men designated for the task. Herodotus also records the words that the executors of this 'punishment' were instructed to pronounce on Xerxes' orders—directly addressing the waters of the Hellespont with reproaches for the unjust harm they had inflicted upon the king.

---

[40] Daryaee (2016: 6) apparently accepted the reasoning promoted by Duchesne-Guillemin, as in one of his papers he translated the Avestan term *suβrā-* as trumpet. A similar translation occurs in PV-K1-02, Sec. 2.6, Sent. 135—*MPDC*, where *sūrāgōmand* has been translated as Blashorn.

[41] Cf. Herodotus (2015: 7.19, 1); Haubold (2012: 15–16). Here, the Achaemenid relationship with the sea is situated within a narrative derived from ancient Mesopotamian tradition, beginning with Sargon of Agade. The interpretation of classical Greek texts serves to highlight the response to Persian imperial ideology, particularly regarding the conquest of 'overseas' territories.

If we move beyond the Greek framework of interpretation, Herodotus' account reveals not only Xerxes' repetition of Yima's gesture, compelling the sacred earth to submit to his will in the sense of a 'cultural trick', as Daryaee puts it, but also an echo of the ritual dialogue between the ruler (and guide) and the personified forces of nature. This presents a compelling functional parallel to Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18. In both cases, we find the same ritual components: the use of specific objects and direct verbal persuasion addressed to a personified entity. In the *Vidēvdād*, Yima addresses Spandarmad, the earth-spirit; Xerxes, by contrast, addresses the 'bitter waters' of the Hellespont. In both instances, the act is magical rather than devotional. It does not involve supplication to a deity whose favor may or may not be granted but instead constitutes a performative act of compulsion intended to produce a desired outcome. Thus, neither in Herodotus' narrative nor in the *Vidēvdād* text should these actions be construed as expressions of irreverence toward sacred natural elements. On the contrary, the instruments and gestures described by Herodotus can plausibly be reinterpreted not as tools of punishment, but as pastoral implements: a whip for driving, fetters for binding, and a brand for marking livestock. By the time of Xerxes, the ritual's original symbolic meaning may well have become obscured or recontextualized.

Nonetheless, when read through the lens of Iranian ritual tradition, Herodotus' account offers a complementary and highly relevant framework for understanding the ritual logic of Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18:

2.10 (B) *hō imąm ząm aiβišuuaṯ suβriia zaranaēniia auui dim sifaṯ aštraiia uitiiaojanō friθa spəṇta ārmaite fraca šuua vīca nəmaδəŋha barəθre pasuuąmca staoranąmca mašiiānąmca* (Geldner 1896 Vend.: 8, 9; Jamasp 1907 1: 27, 29–30, 31)

2.10 (B) *ōy ēn zamīg abar suft pad sūrāgōmand zarrēn* (C) *u-š be ān ī suft pad aštar [kū-š abar pad frōd darīd]* (D) *u-š ēdōn guft kū dōšarāmī kun spandarmad [kū dōšarāmīhā dāmān rāy kun ēn tis] frāz raw [kū wēš be dārāš] be hunąm [kū yašt be bāš] barišn ī pahān stōrān ud mardōmān rāy [kun ēn tis]* (Moazami 2014: 50)[42]

2.10 (B) He pierced this earth with the golden goad, (C) he pierced it with the whip (he tore it down); (D) and thus he spoke: o Spandarmad! do a favor [i.e. do this with affection for the sake of creatures]; go forward [i.e. expand], be esteemed (of good name) [so you may be worshipped] for carrying the small and large cattle and men [do this].

Furthermore, the seemingly remote analogy from Herodotus' *Histories* reinforces Bailey's argument that the primary role of the Avestan Yima is that of a herdsman and breeder. It also supports the interpretation of the term *aštar* as a whip. This reading fits well with Bailey's broader hypothesis concerning the personification of

[42] Mss. of Pahl.Vd.: L4 (4600), f15r-f15v; G28 (4680), f13r-f13v; Bh11 (4712), 22v-f23r—*Avestan Digital Archive*; PV-K1–02, Sec. 2.10, Sen. 146, Sec. 2.14, Sen. 161, Sec. 2.18, Sen. 175—*MPDC*; Pahl.Vd. 1859 Columbia, f12v-f13r.

the earth in paragraphs Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18, and of the 'seeds' or 'germs' in Vd. 2.30 and 38. The pastoral—rather than martial—function of the two objects given to Yima by Ahura Mazda is further suggested by the accompanying classificatory noun: Avestan *zaya-*, Middle Persian *zay*. Although often translated as either instrument or weapon, there is substantial evidence in favor of the former. In his dictionary entry for *zaya-*, Bartholomae lists both meanings, but illustrates the sense 'instrument' using a passage from Vd. 2.6 rather than interpreting it as a weapon (Bartholomae 1904: 1666; Reichelt 1911: 220).[43] While Lecoq, citing the *Mihr Yašt*, proposes that *aštrā-* may denote a goad or whip used in battle ('aiguillon' or 'fouet' utilisé à la guerre), the context of the *Yašt* does not clearly support a direct association with weaponry. Rather, it appears more plausibly to refer to a whip used to drive horses in a chariot, emphasizing its functional role in control rather than combat.[44] Weapons are in fact referenced frequently throughout the Avesta, especially in texts where types of arms are listed in succession (e.g., in the *Ohrmazd Yašt*, *Mihr Yašt*, *Fravardīn Yašt*, and *Vidēvdād*). Notably, however, neither *suβrā-* nor *aštrā-* is ever included in these enumerations.[45] In contrast, a Middle Persian gloss on Vd. 2.7 makes the nature of the object unmistakably clear, referring to it explicitly as a tool—*abzā*r (2.7 (A) '*kē ǰam būd barišn ī xwadāyīh [kū-š xwadāyīh ēdōn nēk pad ān abzār tuwān kardan]*').[46]

6 The new reading of a term from the Pahlavi gloss

In the sentence from Vd. 2.6 cited at the beginning there remains one term whose meaning has yet to be clarified with full certainty. As it appears solely in the Middle Persian gloss, the ambiguity cannot be resolved through comparison with the Avestan text. The term in question is *mtl'k and is attested in this form in all manuscripts of the *Pahlavi Vidēvdād*, the only alteration being Ms. F10 (4670) f14r, which has mwtl'k and a NP gloss on the margin: mdr'k. Already in the 19th century, Darmesteter recognized the difficulty in interpreting this word and proposed an emendation to mtrk, translating it as seal. He considered this a Middle Persian equivalent of the Avestan *suβrā-* and interpreted *dastak* as referring to the handle of the instrument *aštrā-*.[47] This interpretation was later adopted by N.M. Kanga, who, however, retained the original spelling and read it as *matrâk*, likewise translating it as seal (N.M. Kanga 1900: 17). The same

43 Moazami (2014: 66) translates the Middle Persian term *zay* as instrument.

44 Yt. 10, 112–113. Lecoq (2017: 451); Geldner (1896 Visp. & Kh. Av.: 149–150).

45 Yt. 1. 18; Yt. 10, 39–40; Yt. 13, 72; V. 17. 9–10. Geldner (1896 Visp. & Kh. Av.: 64, 134, 184; Vend.: 111); Lecoq (2017: 327, 427–428, 499, 1012).

46 Mss. of Pahl.Vd.: L4 (4600), f13v; MI3 (4615), f14v; F10 (4670), f14r; G28 (4680), f11r; T44 (4700), f16r-f16v; G34 (4710), f18r-f18v; B1 (4711), f17v-f18r; Bh11 (4712), f21r—*Avestan Digital Archive*; PV-K1–02, Sec. 2.7, Sent. 135—*MPDC*; Pahl.Vd. 1859 Columbia, f10v-f11r; Moazami (2014: 48).

47 '[...] MTRAK, corrigé en MTRK, sera le persan *muhra* »sceau«' (Darmesteter 1892 2: 21 n. 7).

approach is evident in the TITUS digital project, which provides unannotated versions of the text (with the option of consulting MacKenzie's dictionary for individual lexemes). The editors, following Darmesteter's logic, have emended the transcription to *muhrāg*.[48] Similar method is adopted by the editors of *The Zoroastrian Middle Persian Digital Corpus and Dictionary*, in which the reading is *muhrāg ī dastag* [sic] and has been translated as die Scheibe des Griffes, however, it lacks transliteration.[49] Other scholars, by contrast, have not modified the spelling and have restricted themselves to transcribing and translating the term as it appears in the manuscripts. For example, Jamasp offers the transcriptions *matrâk* and *mûtrâk*, translated as polished, enameled, gilt, and adds speculative Arabic equivalents without vocalization—mṭrʾ and mṭlʾ (Jamasp 1907 2: 158). Kapadia reproduces both the transcription and translation given by Jamasp in full (Kapadia 1953: 426). Anklesaria, meanwhile, provides the variant *matrâ*, translating it as [made] of gold (Anklesaria 1949: 18). Moazami initially accepted a modified version of Jamasp's reading, transcribing the term as **matrāg* and interpreting it as having a *polished handle (Moazami 2002: 58, 66). In a later publication, however, she revised both the form and the interpretation to **mutallā*—having a *gilt handle (Moazami 2014: 48, 49). Bāgheri Hasan Kiādeh and Rouholamini Hoseini offer yet another reading. Retaining the original form mtl'k, they transcribe it as *madrāg* and translate it as golden or gilded (Pers. *talāyi*, *motallā*) (Bāgheri Hasan Kiādeh and Rouholamini Hoseini 1393: 48, 64, 105).

All the aforementioned authors appear to treat the attested form in the manuscripts as a phonetic representation of an Iranian lexeme or as a direct loanword. To date, no one has recognized the term under discussion as an aramaeogram, nor has any attempt been made to retrieve and interpret the underlying Middle Persian form concealed within the heterographic notation. In reality, however, the term mtl'k is an aramaeogram, and the failure to identify it as such—repeatedly reproduced in scholarly literature—is surprising. Even more striking is that several editors and compilers of dictionaries or glossaries correctly identify the meaning of the word while ignoring its form, which should have prompted further investigation. Leaving aside Darmesteter's arbitrary emendation and inaccurate translation, it becomes evident that H. Jamasp was the first to propose a semantically accurate interpretation. Nonetheless, subsequent authors merely reiterated his interpretation while preserving his erroneous transcription—some reproducing it verbatim, others introducing only minor phonetic modifications. Only M. Moazami made a substantial revision, replacing *matrāg* with *mutallā* in a later publication. Although Jamasp did not elaborate on the basis for his translation, it is reasonable to infer that, by

48 *Thesaurus Indogermanischer Text- und Sprachmaterialien (TITUS)*. Accessed 20 May 2025. https://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/indexe.htm?/index.htm.

49 Ms. K1 (PV-K1–02), sec. 2.6, sent. 135—*The Zoroastrian Middle Persian Digital Corpus and Dictionary (MPCD)*. Accessed 22 September 2025. https://www.mpcorpus.org.

including two Arabic equivalents in his glossary, he may have intuitively recognized the Semitic origin of the term. Of the two Arabic forms he suggests, only mṭlʾ is contextually appropriate. Contrary to the readings proposed by Jamasp and later scholars—including Moazami's revised version—the form is not a single, unified phonetic structure. Rather, it is a heterogram combining an Aramaic root with an Iranian suffix, forming an adjective (originally a past participle) used attributively with the following noun *dastag* (handle). The entire expression should be read as MTLA-k dstk, meaning gilt (or adorned) handle.

However, even turning to Aramaic does not immediately resolve the ambiguity. Although the form MTLA is attested in the Middle Persian heterogram lexicon *Frahang ī Pahlawīg*, its Iranian equivalent is given as *wārān*, meaning rain. The vocalized Aramaic form in this case is *miṭrā*, which is incompatible with the context under consideration.[50] It was likely this dictionary entry that influenced Jamasp to suggest the Arabic alternative mṭrʾ, since in both Aramaic and Arabic the root mṭr refers to rainfall. He may also have had the Semitic root ṭrw in mind, though like mṭr, and consequently mṭrʾ, it is contextually inappropriate and does not support the proposed translation. When we consider the second Arabic form suggested by Jamasp—mṭlʾ—the only Semitic root that plausibly applies is the triconsonantal root ṭly, which conveys the meaning to adorn or to overlay (with metal), especially in the sense of gilding. In Arabic, this root gives rise to the derived passive participle and adjectival form *muṭallā*, meaning gilded or decorated (with a precious metal), most often gold. In Aramaic, this same root appears in nouns such as ṭly and ṭlyyh, denoting an unclear category of precious object. These terms occur in both the Babylonian Talmud and the Palestinian Talmud, which are written in the dialects of Aramaic used respectively by Babylonian and Galilean Jewish communities. In one instance, ṭly is explicitly used in a context associated with gold, in the expression b-ṭly dhb (with gilded/golden ornament) (Kaufman et al.).

Accordingly, the correct transcription of the Aramaeogram with the suffix -k should be *pēsīdag*, where *pēsīd* represents the proper reading of the Aramaic heterogram MTLA, and *-ag* is its Iranian morphological component. The full expression MTLA-k dstk should thus be transcribed as *pēsīdag dastag* and translated as (with) a gilt handle. The form *pēsīdag* is attested in other Middle Persian texts—most notably in the *Bundahišn* and the *Pahlavi Vištāsp Yašt*—where it carries the meaning adorned, decorated, or inlaid with precious stones. It is therefore a recognized and lexicographically recorded term within the Middle Persian corpus.[51] In contrast, the aramaeogram

---

50 MṬR' / Regen / *vārān* (Junker 1955: 31); MTL' / *miṭrā* / *vārān* / rain (Nyberg and Utas 1988: 1 (entry I: 16) 62).

51 '*zamān ī mān abganīhēd brīn pad zamān pēsīdag frāz škihēd*' (Pakzad 2005: 18:); (*ārāste*) (Bahār 1345: 36); *pysytk' / pēsītak* (*gouhar-nešān*) (Bahār 1345: 145); *pēsītak* (*ārāyeš šode, zinat šode, mozayyan, gouhar-nešān*) (Faravashi 1358: 461). Mss.: GBd 1.43 – DH_162r_18, sent. 83; GBd 1.43—TD1_004v_17, sent. 82; GBd 1.43—TD2_10_13, sent. 85; Pahl. Višt. Yt. F12a – PVyt vyts_ch4_st9 sent. 149: '*pad harwisp pēsīdag*'—*The Zoroastrian Middle Persian Digital Corpus and Dictionary (MPCD)*; F12 (5310), Navsari, f29v—*Avestan Digital Archive*.

MTLA appears to be a hapax, attested only once in the extant textual tradition. Thus, the sentence of Vd. 2.6 in its Middle Persian recension should be presented—with transliteration, transcription, and translation—as follows:

2.6 (A) ADYN’ OL OLE zdȳ pr’č YBLWN-t L MNW ’whrmẕd HWE-m (B) swl’k’wmnd ZHBA-yn’ W ’štl-č Y ZHBA-yn’ psyd [MATLA-k dstk’]

2.6 (A) ‘*ēg ō ōy zay frāz burd man kē ohrmazd ham* (B) *sūrāgōmand zarrēn ud aštar-iz zarrēn-pēsīd [pēsīdag dastag]*’

2.6 (A) Then did I, Ohrmazd, brought him the implements: (B) a golden goad and a gilt whip [with an adorned handle].

7 Conclusion

To conclude, a thorough re-examination of the primary sources leads to the following observations concerning the translation of Vd. 2.6:

I. There is sufficient textual evidence to support the conclusion that weaponry does not belong to the semantic field of the terms *suβrā-/sūrāgōmand* and *aštrā-/aštar*.

II. On this basis, two plausible interpretations remain for the term *suβrā-/sūrāgōmand*: a cattle-driving implement or a musical instrument. Among these, Bailey’s interpretation—as a tool used for driving cattle—appears the most substantiated and thus the most compelling. A close reading of the Middle Persian version of the Yima narrative further supports the rejection of the musical instrument hypothesis, particularly when considering the verbs *suftan* (to pierce, perforate) and *darīdan* (to tear, rend), which clearly favor an implement associated with physical action. The use of term *zaya- / zay* in Vd. 2.6 ultimately excludes the musical instrument.

III. With regard to the term *aštrā- / aštar*, two main interpretations have been proposed: a whip or a sharply pointed implement (such as a goad or spike). The use of the verb *suftan* in Pahl. Vd. 2.10, 14, and 18 may be seen as a clue supporting the latter interpretation. However, the broader textual and comparative context favors the meaning whip. In particular, the reference to Herodotus’ account of Xerxes’ crossing of the Hellespont, along with the verb *darīdan*—which may apply specifically to the noun *aštar*—strengthens this reading. Within this framework, the whip appears as an emblematic attribute of the warrior-king riding in his chariot.

IV. The term found in the gloss to Vd. 2.6 is an aramaeogram with an Iranian suffix—MTLA-k—which has not previously been recognized as a heterogram. Its correct Iranian equivalent is *pēsīdag,* making it possible to read the gloss as *pēsīdag dastag* and translate it as—with an adorned handle.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

Mirosław Michalak https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2609-4418

References

Andrés-Toledo, Miguel Ángel. 2015. 'Primary Sources: Avestan and Pahlavi'. In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, edited by Michael Stausberg, Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina, and Anna Tessmann, 519–528. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.

Andrés-Toledo, Miguel Ángel. 2016. *The Zoroastrian Law to Expel the Demons: Widēwdād 10–15*. Iranica 23. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Aeschylus. 1903. *Persae*. Edited by Arthur Sidgwick. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Anklesaria, Behramgore T. 1949. *Pahlavi Vendîdâd: Zand-î Jvît-Dêv-Dât*. Bombay: K.R. Cama Oriental Institute.

Avestan Digital Archive. Accessed 22 September 2025. https://ada.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/. Manuscripts of the *Pahlavi Vidēvdād*: L4 (4600), date: 1323 or 1363, British Library London; K1 (4610), date: 1324, Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen; MI3 (4615), date: 1594, Col. Univ. Library New York; F10 (4670), date: 1815, Navsari; G28 (4680), date: ca. 1830, Navsari; T44 (4700), date: 1839–1841, Navsari; G34 (4710), date: 1835 (terminus ante quem), Navsari; B1 (4711), date: 1865 (terminus ante quem), Bombay; Bh11 (4712), undated, Pune.

Azarnouche, Samra, ed. 2013. *Husraw ī Kawādān ud Rēdag-ē: Khosrow fils de Kawād et un page*. Studia Iranica. Cahier 49. Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes.

Bahār, Mehrdād. 1362. *Pažuheši dar asātir-e Irān. Pāre-ye naxost*. Tehrān: Entešārāt-e Tus.

Bahār, Mehrdād. 1345. *Vāzhe-nāme-ye Bondaheš*. Tehrān: Entešārāt-e Bonyād-e Farhang-e Irān.

Bāgheri Hasan Kiādeh, Ma'sumeh, and Somayyeh Rouholamini Hoseini. 1393. *Dāstān-e ǰam (hamrāh bā āvā-nevisi va tarjomeh-ye fārsi-ye matn-e zand-e fargard-e dovvom-e vendidād)*. Tehrān: Mo'assese-ye Farhangi-Entešārati-ye Pāzineh.

Bailey, H.W. 1943. *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-Century Books*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Bartholomae, Christian. 1904. *Altiranisches Vörterbuch*, Strassburg: K.J. Trübner.

Boyce, Mary. 1968. 'Middle Persian Literature'. In *Handbuch der Orientalistik*. Abt. I, Bd. IV, Abschn. 2., Lfg. 1, 31–66. Leiden: Brill.

Cantera, Alberto. 2004. *Studien zur Pahlavi-Übersetzung des Avesta*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Cereti, Carlo G. 2009. 'Middle Persian Literature i. Pahlavi Literature'. In *Encyclopaedia Iranica, online edition*. Accessed on 20 May 2025. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/middle-persian-literature-1-pahlavi.

Christensen, Arthur. 1934. *Les types du premier homme et du premier roi dans l'histoire légendaire des Iraniens*. Part 2. Stockholm: Norstedt & Söner.

Darmesteter, James. 1880–1883. *The Zend-Avesta. Parts I and II*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Darmesteter, James. 1892–1893. *Le Zend-Avesta*. 3 vols. Paris: Ernest Leroux.

Daryaee, Touraj. 2018. 'Middle Persian (Pahlavi)'. In *A Companion to Late Antique Literature*, edited by Scott McGill and Edward J. Watts, 103–121. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell.

Daryaee, Touraj. 2016. 'Whipping the Sea and the Earth: Xerxes at the Hellespont and Yima at the Vara'. *Dabir* 1 (2): 4–9.

Duchesne-Guillemin, Jacques. 1979. ‘Cor de Yima et trompette d’Isrāfil: de la cosmologie mazdéenne à l’eschatologie musulmanne’. *Comptes-rendus de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*, 539–549.

Faravashi, Bahrām. 1358. *Farhang-e zabān-e pahlavi*. Tehrān: Entešārāt-e Dānešgāh-e Tehrān.

Geldner, Karl F. 1896. *Avesta: The Sacred Books of the Parsis*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Haubold, Johannes. 2012. ‘The Achaemenid Empire and the Sea’. *Mediterranean Historical Review* 27 (1): 4–23.

Hedāyati, Šahrām. 1349. ‘Suvrā va aštrā dar dāstān-e ǰam-e vendidād’. *Našriye-ye anǰoman-e farhang-e irān-e bāstān* 8, šomāre-ye 2: 108–145.

Herodotus. 2015. *Herodoti Historiae*, edited by Nigel G. Wilson. Vol. I (libri I–IV), vol. II (libri V–IX). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jamasp, Hoshang. 1907. *Vendidâd. Avesta Text with Pahlavi Translation and Commentary, and Glossarial Index*. 2 vols. Bombay: Government Central Book Depot.

Josephson, Judith. 1997. *The Pahlavi Translation Technique as Illustrated by Hōm Yašt*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Iranica Upsaliensia 2. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet Bibliotek.

Junker, Heinrich F.J., 1955. *Das Frahang i Pahlavīk in zeichengemäßer Anordnung*. Leipzig: Harrassowitz.

Kanga, Kavasji E. 1900. *A Complete Dictionary of the Avesta Language*. Bombay: The Education Society’s Steam Press.

Kanga, Navroji M. 1900. *The Pahlavi Vendîdâd*, Bombay: Captain Printing Works.

Kapadia, Dinshah D. 1953. *Glossary of Pahlavi Vendidad*. Bombay: Shahnamah Press.

Kaufman, Stephen A. et al. *The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*. Accessed 20 May 2025. https://cal.huc.edu.

Kellens, Jean. 1974. *Les noms-racines de l’Avesta*. Wiesbaden: Reichert.

Kellens, Jean. 1984. ‘Yima, magicien entre les dieux et les hommes’. In *Orientalia J. Duchesne-Guillemin emerito oblata*, 267–281. Acta Iranica 23. Leiden: Brill.

Kellens, Jean. 1988. ‘Yima et la mort’. In *Languages and Cultures: Studies in Honor of Edgar C. Polome*, edited by Mohammad Ali Jazayery and Werner Winter, 329–334. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Kłagisz, Mateusz. 2015. *A Glance at New Persian Translations of the Middle Persian Texts*. In *In Quest of Identity: Studies on Persianate World*, edited by Mirosław Michalak and Magdalena Rodziewicz, 55–74, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Dialog.

Klíma, Otakar. 1968. ‘Avesta. Ancient Persian Inscriptions. Middle Persian Literature’. In *History of Iranian Literature*, by Jan Rypka, 1–66, Dordrecht: D. Reidel.

Lecoq, Pierre. 2017. *Les livres de l’Avesta. Textes sacrés des Zoroastriens*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf.

MacKenzie, David N. 1986. *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary*. London: Oxford University Press.

Macuch, Maria. 2009. ‘Pahlavi Literature’. In *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran*, edited by Ronald E. Emmerick and Maria Macuch, 116–196. A History of Persian Literature 17. London: I.B. Tauris.

Malandra, William W. 2015. ‘Vendīdād i. Survey of the History and Contents of the Text’. In *Encyclopaedia Iranica, online edition*. Accessed on 20 May 2025. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/vendidad.

Mansuri, Yadollāh. 1384. *Barrasi-ye riše-šenāxti-ye fe’lhā-ye zabān-e pahlavi (fārsi-ye miyāne-ye zardošti)*. Tehrān: Farhangestān-e Zabān va Adab-e Fārsi [Mansouri, Yadollah. 2005. *An Etymological Study of Pahlavi Verbs*. Tehran: Academy of Persian Language and Literature].

Moazami, Mahnaz. 2002. ‘The Legend of the Flood in Zoroastrian Tradition’. *Persica* 18: 55–74.

Moazami, Mahnaz. 2014 *Wrestling with the Demons of the Pahlavi Widēwdād: Transcription, Translation, and Commentary*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Moghaddam, Mohammad. 1363. *Dāstān-e ǰam: matn-e avestā va zand (fargard-e dovvom vidivdāt)*. Tehrān: Sāzemān-e Entešārāt-e Farvahar.
Molāyi, Čangiz [Mowlaee, Changiz]. 1402. *Dāstān-e ǰam: barrasi-ye fargard-e dovvom-e vendidād*. Tehrān: Āvā-ye Xāvar.
Nyberg, Henrik S., and Bo Utas. 1988. *Frahang i pahlavīk*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
Pahlavi Vidēvdād. 1859. Cat. No. X892.5Av3 S4. Columbia University N.Y. Accessed 22 September 2025. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nnc2.ark:/13960/t1ph1c67f&seq=1.
Pakzad, Fazlollah. 2005. *Bundahišn. Zoroastrische Kosmogonie und Kosmologie. Bd. I Kritische Edition*. Tehran: Centre for the Great Islamic Encyclopaedia.
Redard, Céline. 2021. *Vidēvdād 19, Le récit de la victoire de Zarathuštra sur Anhra Maińiiu*. Leuven: Peeters.
Reichelt, Hans. 1911. *Avesta Reader: Texts, Notes, Glossary and Index*. Strassburg: K.J. Trübner.
Sanjana, Darab D.P. 1895. *The Zand î Javît Shêda Dât or the Pahlavi Version of the Avesta Vendidad*. Bombay: The Education Society's Steam Press.
Shaki, Mansour. 2000. 'Gabr'. In *Encyclopaedia Iranica,* 10 (3): 239–240. New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press.
Spiegel, Friedrich. 1852–1863. *Avesta. Die heiligen Schriften der Parsen*. 3 vols. Leipzig: W. Engelmann.
Tafazzoli, Ahmad. 1355. 'Suvrā-ye ǰamšid va suvrā-ye zahhāk'. *Maǰalle-ye dāneškade-ye adabiyāt va olum-e ensāni-ye danešgāh-e tehrān* sāl-e 23, šomāre-ye 4: 48–50.
Tavadia, Jehangir C. 1956. *Die mittelpersische Sprache und Literatur der Zarathustrier*. Leipzig: Harrassowitz.
The Zoroastrian Middle Persian Digital Corpus and Dictionary (*MPCD)*. Accessed 22 September 2025. https://www.mpcorpus.org. PV-K1–02 (Pahl. Vd.), Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen; F12a – 5310 (*Pahlavi Vištāsp Yašt*), Navsari; DH (*Bundahišn*) – P.K. Anklesaria, *Codex DH (facs. ed.)*, Tehran 1971; TD1 (*Bundahišn*) – P.K. Anklesaria, *TD1 facs. ed.*, Tehran 1970; TD2 (*Bundahišn*) – K.M. JamaspAsa et al., *Ms. TD2*, Shiraz 1978.
Thesaurus Indogermanischer Text- und Sprachmaterialien (TITUS). Accessed 20 May 2025. https://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/indexe.htm?/index.htm.
Wolff, Fritz. 1910. *Avesta. Die heiligen Bücher der Parsen*. Strassburg: K.J. Trübner.
Zeini, Arash. 2020. *Zoroastrian Scholasticism in Late Antiquity: The Pahlavi Version of the Yasna Haptaŋhāiti*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

FOLIA ORIENTALIA—BIBLIOTHECA 2 (2025)
DOI 10.24425/for.2025.156878

Joanna Jurewicz
University of Warsaw, Poland | j.jurewicz@uw.edu.pl

Translation of the *Mahābhārata* and Cognitive Linguistics

Abstract This article analyses the battle descriptions in the *Mahābhārata* from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, focusing on how the epic's oral character shapes its linguistic and narrative structure. Drawing on the author's experience as a translator of Sanskrit into Polish, the study explores the relationship between word order and viewpoint construal, showing how syntactic strategies guide the listener's imagination and evoke emotional responses. Using a passage from Book VI, the analysis demonstrates how shifts in prominence and perspective—expressed through zooming in and out—create a dynamic interplay between proximity and distance, slowing down or accelerating narrative time. These changes enable the audience to experience the battle both as spectacle and as tragedy. The article argues that the *Mahābhārata*'s orality fosters an imagery-oriented mode of storytelling, in which grammar itself becomes a tool of visualisation. A comparison with Alex Cherniak's English translation highlights how the constraints of English syntax can obscure these cognitive effects, raising broader questions about the limits of translation when it comes to rendering construal and viewpoint.

Keywords *Mahābhārata*, cognitive linguistics, translation studies, orality, construal, viewpoint, iconicity, Sanskrit syntax, word order, imagination

1 *Mahābhārata*

The *Mahābhārata*, 'The Great Tale of the Bharata Dynasty', is a Sanskrit epic and the largest epic in human history, consisting of one hundred thousand verses according to the critical edition (Sukthankar et al. 1927–1959). The *Mahābhārata* is a collective work, yet its unknown authors attribute its composition to the sage Vyāsa. Scholars debate both the time of its creation and whether it was originally composed orally or as a written work (Brockington 1997; Fitzgerald 2002; 2003; Hiltebeitel 2001a–e; see also Adluri 2013; Adluri and Bagchee 2016; 2018).

The dating of the epic is generally placed between the 4th century BCE and the 4th century CE. In addition to the critical edition, there are also various recensions of

© 2025 The Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

the *Mahābhārata*, some longer than the critical version, compiled in different regions of India and at different times. The central narrative of the *Mahābhārata* and various motifs derived from it have been extensively used in classical Sanskrit literature and art. In contemporary times, the epic has been adapted into multi-episode television series. The *Mahābhārata* has also permeated Hinduism and is known wherever this religion is practiced (Geertz 1973).

The central plot revolves around the history of two related dynasties, the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, and their ongoing rivalry—first for dominance within the family, and later for control over a vast kingdom. This conflict ultimately culminates in a brutal, fratricidal war that lasts for 18 days and leads to the near-total destruction of both lineages.[1] The war narrative constitutes about one-third of the entire *Mahābhārata* (Books VI to X), while the remaining books depict the events leading up to the war and its aftermath. The main storyline is interwoven with additional narratives (*upakhyana*), and many scholars argue that, despite their apparent lack of connection to the central plot, these supplementary tales are not introduced randomly. Instead, their content enriches and deepens the overall meaning of the *Mahābhārata* (Adluri 2013).

When it comes to European languages, the *Mahābhārata* has been fully translated only into English (Milewska 2012). The most frequently translated part of the epic is the *Bhagavadgītā*, or 'The Song of the Lord'. This is the only section that has been rendered into numerous languages, including several Polish translations (e.g. Sachse 1988; 2019; Kudelska 1995; Rucińska 2002).[2] The *Bhagavadgītā* consists of the teachings of Kṛṣṇa, the human incarnation (*avatāra*) of the god Vishnu, given to the warrior Arjuna (a member of the Pāṇḍava lineage, with Kṛṣṇa serving as his charioteer) just before the war begins. As the armies stand ready for battle, Arjuna realises that in this fratricidal conflict, he will have to kill his own relatives. Overcome by moral and emotional turmoil, he decides to renounce the fight. The battle books of the *Mahābhārata*, from which I will discuss a passage here, narrate what happens next—after Kṛṣṇa persuades Arjuna that, as a warrior by birth, he must fight.

Currently, a team of Polish Indologists from the University of Warsaw, the University of Wrocław, and Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań is working on a project funded by the National Program for the Development of the Humanities.[3] Their goal is to produce the first complete Polish translation of all the battle books of the *Mahābhārata*. The following analysis presents insights that emerged during my translation of Book VI.

---

1 Twelve warriors survived the *Mahabharata* war: the five Pāṇḍava brothers, Kṛṣṇa—their ally, Satyaki—a supporter of the Pāṇḍavas, Yuyutsu—the only son of King Dhritarashtra (see below), Aśvatthāman, Kṛpa, Kṛtavarman, and Vṛṣaketu (supporters of the Kauravas).

2 See 'Tłumaczenia BhG'. Accessed 8 August 2025. http://www.bhagavadgita.eu/?page_id=94.

3 Joanna Jurewicz (coordinator of the project), Andrzej Babkiewicz, Monika Nowakowska, Sven Sellmer, Przemysław Szczurek, Anna Trynkowska.

Until recently, Indology maintained the belief that battle descriptions, being subject to the constraints of oral transmission, were highly conventionalised and generally did not contribute anything new to the main plot. Indeed, the repetitive conventions of describing duels, for example, are noticeable: heroes wield the same weapons and fight in similar ways. However, this does not mean that such passages were lifeless or meaningless to Sanskrit audiences.

Regardless of whether the *Mahābhārata* was originally composed in written form or remained an oral tradition for some time, it undoubtedly emerged from an oral tradition. Its audience consisted of people who could not read and could only listen to the epic as it was recited by bards. A detailed discussion of the differences between understanding spoken and written texts goes beyond the scope of this analysis, but I must emphasise one crucial feature of a mind accustomed to oral transmission: imagination. This faculty allows listeners to construct vivid, detailed mental images from relatively concise verbal narration. In my view, it was precisely this ability that made it possible to listen to the *Mahābhārata* endlessly—each time, the imagination could engage with the story in a new and unique way.

Moreover, the main heroes of the *Mahābhārata*—of whom there are many—are described in great detail throughout the epic, including their physical appearance, family and geographical origins, and the specific adventures or events associated with them. Many of them were well-established figures in tradition. Likewise, the types of weapons used in battle must have been well known to the audience. It can therefore be assumed that simply hearing a hero's name evoked in the listener's imagination the entire history of that character, along with details of their appearance, making the audience emotionally engaged. They not only understood the narrative but also experienced it on a deeper level.

The war described in the epic takes place on the Field of Kuru, involving hundreds of thousands of warriors on both sides. The narrator of the war's events is Sañjaya who possesses extraordinary abilities: he can see everything, read minds, and be omnipresent on the battlefield without any risk to himself (*Mahābhārata* 6.2.9–12). Sañjaya is the minister and charioteer of the blind King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the father of the Kaurava lineage.

The Mahābhārata is organised in a nested narrative structure, whereby successive layers of embedded narratives function as frames for further stories. In case of the Battle Books, the repeated vocatives directed at the king constantly remind the audience that the war is being conveyed through Sañjaya's oral narration. These vocatives vary in form but appear in almost every verse, producing a significant emotional impact on the listener. The Kauravas ultimately loses the war, which is a profound tragedy for the king—he loses all his sons except one (having had a hundred of them). If the listener identifies with him as the primary recipient of this war account, they will grieve alongside him. At the same time, the *Mahābhārata*'s narrator aligns himself with the victorious Pāṇḍavas. Despite the various deceptions they employ to secure victory, the audience, while mourning with Dhṛtarāṣṭra, comes

to feel that this destruction was inevitable. This, in turn, opens a space for deeper metaphysical reflection.

2 War is a show

War is described in the *Mahābhārata* as a spectacle, as a show the recipients of which are firstly Sañjaya and Dhrtarastra who listens to the story, and then—the recipients of the epic. The spectators of this story also include superhuman beings.

> *atha devāḥ sagandharvāḥ pitaraś ca janeśvara*
> *siddhacāraṇasaṃghāś ca samīyus te didṛkṣayā*
> *ṛṣayaś ca mahābhāgāḥ puraskṛtya śatakratum*
> *samīyus tatra sahitā draṣṭuṃ tad vaiśasaṃ mahat* || (6.43.9–10)
>
> Then the gods, *gandhárvas*, Manes, and multitudes of *siddha*s and *cháranas* gathered there, lord of the people, wanting to witness the combat.
> The highly fortunate *rishi*s, led by Indra the lord of a hundred sacrifices, assembled there to observe that great slaughter. (Cherniak's translation)
>
> *tatra devarṣayaḥ siddhāś cāraṇāś ca samāgatāḥ*
> *praikṣanta tad raṇaṃ ghoraṃ devāsurasamaṃ bhuvi* || (6.45.85)
>
> The divine *rishi*s, *siddha*s and *cháranas* assembled to watch the fierce encounter there on earth that resembled the war between the gods and demons. (Cherniak's translation)

The war is a spectacle also for those who participate in it. Here is an example in which the war is admired by both supernatural beings and the warriors participating in it:

> *tad avekṣya kṛtaṃ karma rākṣasena balīyasā*
> *divi devāḥ sagandharvā munayaś cāpi vismitāḥ*
> *pāṇḍavāś ca maheṣvāsā bhīmasenapurogamāḥ*
> *sādhu sādhv iti nādena pṛthivīm anvanādayan* || (6.95.67–68)
>
> Watching that feat that that immensely powerful demon performed, even the gods, *gandhárvas*, and sages in heaven were filled with amazement. And the Pándavas, led by Bhimasena, great king, made the earth resound with their shouts: 'Superb! Superb!' (Cherniak's translation)

Admiration for the great appearance of warriors or the dexterity shown by them in duels is expressed, for example, when a warrior heavily wounded by arrows looks as beautiful as a tree covered with red flowers (e.g. 6.46.46, 53.24, 101.17).

3 The aim of the paper and methodology

I believe that the orality of the *Mahābhārata*, both in its creation process and in its presentation and reception, influenced the way it was created aiming at the maximum

stimulation of the recipient's imagination. The Composers of the *Mahābhārata* achieve this goal not only at the semantic level, through the careful selection of words and expressions, but also at the syntactic level, for example, through the proper word order. Every translator is aware that translating the semantics of the source text poses many challenges, but translating syntactic strategies that allow the author of the source text to convey meaning in this way is even more difficult, and in many cases impossible, especially if the target language has a rather rigid syntax, as is the case with English. I am a translator of Sanskrit into Polish, and in this article, I will discuss how the translator of Volume 6 of the *Mahābhārata*, Alex Cherniak, attempts to tackle this issue. I wish to stress that my intention is not to criticize Cherniak's translation in this regard, but to point to the broader issue of how the viewpoint of the original is to be rendered in a target language characterised by a comparatively rigid word order, unlike inflected languages such as Sanskrit.[4]

The methodological approach accepted in this study is cognitive linguistics. According to it, language is an integral part of cognitive processes and expresses them. Human cognition is not objective, but always takes place from some perspective, which is reflected not only in the choice of words, but also in the grammatical and syntactic aspects of a sentence.[5] This ability 'to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways' (Langacker 2008: 43) is called construal. An important aspect of construal is vantage point (or viewpoint) which influences how we organise our thinking in relation to a given phenomenon. Another aspect influencing construal, often dependent on viewpoint, is prominence—that is, the aspect that determines which elements in the scene are key for the audience (Langacker 2008).

For example, two sentences: 'The lamp is above the table' and 'The table is under the lamp' refer to the same situation, i.e. the relationship of two objects to each other on the vertical axis, but these sentences are not synonymous, because the prepositions 'above' and 'under' have different meanings. But not only their opposed meanings are responsible for the non-synonymity of these sentences. What also distinguishes these sentences is the viewpoint from which we construe a sentence: we emphasise a different part of the spatial relationship, although the relationship itself remains the same. In the first case, the sentence is constructed from the viewpoint of the lamp, while in the second, it is from the viewpoint of the table. However, the difference between the sentences 'There is a lamp above the table' and 'Above the table, there is a lamp' results from a difference in prominence within the same viewpoint: in the first case, our attention is focused on the lamp, while in the second, it is on the table. Langacker (2008) calls an expression of greater prominence 'a figure', the others constitute the 'background'.

For the analysis of the change of prominence in the descriptions of the battle in *Mahābhārata*, which will be the subject of this analysis, another aspect of construal

---

[4] I discussed the issue of translating the *Mahabharata* into Polish in Jurewicz (2022).

[5] The issue of how a sentence describing a given event (or object) is structured depending on the narrator's viewpoint has been analysed by researchers within the field of cognitive linguistics by Tabakowska (1995), Langacker (2005; 2008), Wiraszka (2015), Dancygier, Lu, and Verhagen (2016).

(dependent on viewpoint) is still important, namely the categories of zooming-in and out (Langacker 2008). As an example of zooming-in, researchers usually give sentences describing the position of the object, e.g. the sentence 'Your camera is upstairs, in the bedroom, in the cupboard, on the top shelf' is an example of zooming-in, while the sentence 'Your camera is on the top shelf, in the cupboard in the bedroom, upstairs' is an example of zooming-out (Langacker 2008: 81). During this process of conceptualisation, the figure becomes the background for the next figure and the prominence changes accordingly to what the conceptualiser sees. The categories of zooming-in and out influence our experience of time which slows down during zooming in and speeds up when zoom-out begins. Time acceleration is greatest when the ultimate zoom-out occurs immediately after the zoom-in. Hence, the meaning of a linguistic expression conveys not only conceptual content but also construal, with its various aspects (viewpoint, prominence, zooming in and out). Depending on all these factors, a given scene can be mentally visualised and expressed in various ways.

As mentioned above, I will analyse the shift in viewpoint which is linguistically expressed through word order and which iconically represents it, thereby reflecting the chronological sequence of events. Nils Enkvist (1990), as cited by Tabakowska (2003), distinguishes three types of iconicity: action-oriented, location-oriented, and time-oriented. In the case of the battle descriptions of the *Mahabharata*, one can speak of action-oriented iconicity,[6] which reflects the movement of the *conceptualiser* as they alternately approach and move away.[7] Zoom-in occurs when the narrator moves closer to the scene of the described event, while zoom-out happens when the narrator withdraws. I also assume that the use of expanding insight reflects the perspective of a narrator who is not directly engaged in the battle, whereas narrowing insight allows the audience to grasp and experience the horrors of war through detailed descriptions of the wounded or dead—both humans and animals—as well as the destruction of valuable objects.

In my interpretation of the descriptions of the war in the *Mahābhārata*, I will use a metaphor of camera also adopted in the studies of European epics. For example, Bonifazi (2016: 133), in her analysis of Serbo-Croatian and early Greek epics, writes:

> it is as if the singer in the structuring of the song moves his 'camera-in-the-mind' to redirect the visual focus by means of ad hoc narrative discourse acts, with closeup and zooming-in effects. In those cases metacommunication relies on visualisation.[8]

In the analysis I follow the version of the original adopted by Alex Cherniak (2008–2009). Translations of analysed stanzas are provided in interlinear format in accordance

6 As a typical example of such iconicity, Enkvist provides an instruction manual for a device (cited in Tabakowska 1993: 108).

7 Enkvist refers to this type of iconicity as experiential iconicity (cited in Tabakowska 1993: 108).

8 The camera metaphor is also used in studies of European epics, including Bakker (2005), Minchin (2001), Bonifazi (2008; 2012), Elmer (2009), Bonifazi and Elmer (2012a; 2012b).

with the Leipzig Glossing Rules, together with a literal rendering that preserves the original word order as far as possible. In the footnotes I cite Cherniak's translation, occasionally with my own remarks.

So let us follow with the eyes of our mind the camera of Sanjaya.

4 Analysis

I will analyse one fragment that might seem boring at first sight, namely *Mahābhārata* 6.96.44–62. In this analysis, I will focus on word order as a means of expressing shifts in the construal of scenes. In verses representing a neutral viewpoint, I will cite Cherniak's translation. However, in verses where word order is crucial for scene construction or in cases where a word or phrase has been retranslated, Cherniak's translation will be provided in the footnotes. In the main text, I will analyse the stanzas preserving the order of words in Sanskrit original to show how change of prominence together with the change of the viewpoint are gained in this way. Thanks to that, we will see how the grammar of the target language constrains the translator.

After the death of Irāvat (one of the heroes fighting on the side of the Pāṇḍavas), a cruel fight begins between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. Let me quote the stanzas which settle the closest context:

> *tatrākrando mahān āsīt tava teṣāṃ ca bhārata |*
> *nighnatāṃ dṛḍham anyonyaṃ kurvatāṃ karma duṣkaram ||* (6.96.44)
>
> A great combat ensued between your warriors and those of the enemy, descendant of Bhārata, as they smashed each other up severely, doing deeds that were difficult to do.
>
> *anyonyaṃ hi raṇe śūrāḥ keśeṣv ākṣipya māninaḥ |*
> *nakhair dantair ayudhyanta muṣṭibhir jānubhis tathā ||* (6.96.45)
>
> The proud heroes fought dragging one another by the hair and using their fingernails, teeth, fists, knees,
>
> *bāhubhiś ca talaiś caiva nistriṃśaiś ca susaṃsthitaiḥ |*
> *vivaraṃ prāpya cānyonyam anayan yamasādanam ||* (6.96.46)
>
> palms, swords, and handsome arms. Finding each other's weak spots, they sent one another to the realm of Yama.
>
> *nyahanac ca pitā putraṃ putraś ca pitaraṃ tathā |*
> *vyākulīkṛtasarvāṅgā yuyudhus tatra mānavāḥ ||* (6.96.47)
>
> Father struck down son, and son father. Men stunned in their every limb fought on there.

As we can see, the fight is really fierce but is described from the neutral point of view. Now Sañjaya comes closer to see the weapons lying down on the battlefield (**zoom-in**, **48ac**):

raṇa-e	*cāru-ūṇi*	*cāpa-āni*	*hema-pṛṣṭha-āni*	*māriṣaØ* |
battle	beautiful	bow	gold-backed	O-noble-lord
-LOC.SG	-NOM.PL.N	-NOM.PL.N	-NOM.PL.N	-VOC.SG.M

'On the battlefield, beautiful bows with golden staves, my lord,'

hata-ānām	*apa-viddha-āni*
slain-GEN.PL.M	dropped-away-PPP.NOM.PL.N

'by those who are slain—dropped away'

The order of words in the stanza reflects the scenario of Sañjaya's perception. He looks at the battlefield the concept of which is syntactically the most prominent (48a), but then prominence is placed on the bows (48a) and their golden staves (48b). Then Sañjaya sees that they belong to the slain warriors (48c: *hatānām*) who dropped them (48c: *apaviddhāni*).

But he as if does not want to look at these slain warriors more and, in last verse (48d), he leads us back to the weapons and he contemplates them one by one with all their details (48d–53):

6.96.48d

kalāpa-āś	*ca*	*mahā-dhana-āḥ* ||
quiver-NOM.PL.M	and	great-wealth-NOM.PL.M

'and costly quivers.'[9]

6.96.49

jāta-rūpa-maya-aiḥ	*puṅkha-aiḥ*	*rājata-aiḥ*	*ca*	*śita-āḥ*	*śara-āḥ* |
born-gold-made	feather	silver	and	sharp	arrow
-INS.PL.F	-INS.PL.F	-INS.PL.F		-NOM.PL.M	-NOM.PL.M

'with golden-made and silver feathers—sharp arrows'

taila-dhauta-āḥ	*vy-a-rāj-anta*	*nir-mukta-bhuja-ga-upamā-āḥ* ||
oil-washed-NOM.PL.M	shine-3PL.IMPF.ACT	released-snake-similar-NOM.PL.M

'cleansed with oil, gleamed like released serpents.'[10]

---

[9] 6.96.48: 'Dropped by the slain warriors, my lord, beautiful bows with golden staves, valuable quivers.' In Cherniak's translation, the prominence is placed at the fact that the weapons are dropped by the warriors.

[10] 6.96.49: 'and sharpened arrows finished with nocks of gold and silver and cleansed with oil looked radiant on the battlefield, like snakes that had cast off their sloughs.'

6.96.50

hasti-danta-tsaru-ūn	*khaḍga-ān*	*jāta-rūpa-pariṣkṛt-ān* |
elephant-tooth-scabbard-ACC.PL.M	sword-ACC.PL.M	born-gold-adorned-ACC.PL.M

‘Swords with ivory hilts, adorned with gold,’

carma-āṇi	*cāpa-viddha-āṇi*	*rukma-pṛṣṭha-āṇi*	*dhanvin-ām* ||
shield	bow-pierced	gold-surfaced	archer
-ACC.PL.N	-ACC.PL.N	-ACC.PL.N	-GEN.PL.M

‘Shields, pierced by bows, with golden surfaces—of the archers.’[11]

6.96.51

suvarṇa-vikṛta-prāsa-ān	*paṭṭiśa-ān*	*hema-bhūṣita-ān* |
gold-fashioned-javelins-ACC.PL.M	spears-ACC.PL.M	gold-adorned-ACC.PL.M

‘Gold-furnished javelins, spears fashioned of gold,’

jāta-rūpa-maya-āḥ	*carṣṭī-ḥ*	*śakti-āḥ*	*ca*	*kanaka-ujjvala-āḥ* ||
born-gold-made	darts	lances	and	gold-shining
-ACC.PL.F	-ACC.PL.F	-ACC.PL.F		-ACC.PL.F

‘Golden darts, lances of gold-like shine.’[12]

6.96.52

su-saṃnāha-āḥ	ca	pat-itā	musala-āṇi	gurūṇi	ca |
well-armored	and	fallen	clubs	heavy	also
-ACC.PL.N		-ACC.PL.N	-ACC.PL.N	-ACC.PL.N	

‘Well-prepared—fallen—heavy clubs,’

parigha-ān	*paṭṭiśa-ān*	*ca-eva*	*bhiṇḍipāla-ān*	*ca*	*māriṣaØ* ||
iron-club	spear	and-indeed	maces	and	O-noble-lord
-ACC.PL.M	-ACC.PL.M		-ACC.PL.M		-VOC.SG.M

‘iron clubs, spears, maces, my lord,’[13]

[11] 6.96.50: ‘Fallen warriors dropped their gold-adorned swords with ivory hilts, pierced shields glistening with gold.’ To preserve prominence on the agent, Cherniak adds a phrase ‘Fallen warriors dropped’ at the beginning of the description which in original appears at its end (54ab: *visṛjya patitā narāḥ*), vide note 17.

[12] 6.96.51: ‘gold-furnished javelins, golddecked spears, golden darts, lances of gold-like shine,’

[13] 6.96.52: ‘glittering armor, heavy maces, iron clubs,’

6.96.53

pat-it-ān	*tomara-ān*	*ca-api*	*citra-āḥ*	*hema-pariṣkṛta-āḥ* |
fallen	javelin|	and-also	splendid	gold-adorned
-ACC.PL.M	-ACC.PL.M		-ACC.PL.F	-ACC.PL.F

'Fallen spears too, splendid and adorned with gold'

kuthā-āḥ	*ca*	*bahu-dhā-ākāra-āḥ*	*cāmara-vyajana-āṇi*	*ca* ||
elephant-housing	and	many-kind-shape	yak-tail-fan	and
-ACC.PL.F		-ACC.PL.F	-ACC.PL.N	

'elephants' housings of different shapes, yak tails and fans'[14]

We get an impression that Sañjaya walks around the battle-field and looks at the scattered valuable weapons—perhaps with regret that so much fine weaponry is wasted, perhaps with admiration for its beauty, and the recipient is supposed to do the same.[15] Time seems to slow down and each item seems to be within 'a boxing ring with clear boundaries' (de Kreij 2016: 161). The recipient may stay within it with his mind's eye as long as he wishes. To ensure that the observer does not feel it is merely a catalogue of arms, the composers of the *Mahābhārata* remind us that it is the battlefield that matters: the weapons belong to the archers (*dhanvinām*) (6.96.50d) and lie dropped (*patitā*) on the ground (53a). It is as if Sanjaya's handheld camera occasionally pulls back just slightly from the objects to reveal their immediate context. But generally, this description follows a neutral description of the battle, there is not much terror in it. The terror is to come.

---

[14] 6.96.53: 'sharp-edged spears and small darts, various bows resplendent and adorned with gold, elephants' housings of different shapes, yak tails and fans, my lord.' I quote the whole description in Cherniak's translation to show how the prominence is changed: '**Fallen warriors dropped** their gold-adorned swords with ivory hilts, pierced shields glistening with gold, gold-furnished javelins, golddecked spears, golden darts, lances of gold-like shine, glittering armor, heavy maces, iron clubs, sharp-edged spears and small darts, various bows resplendent and adorned with gold, elephants' housings of different shapes, yak tails and fans, my lord.' The prominence is also altered by the use of the active voice of the verb ('dropped'), which removes the temporal sequence (in the original version, thanks to use the absolutive form visṛjya, the loss of their weapons precedes their death), but also changes the very character of the loss of the weapons: in the original, the weapons rather fall from their hands, rather than being deliberately abandoned by them.

[15] The same zooming-in strategy is also attested in Homeric epic. In his analysis of the use of particle *de* in descriptions of battle and its role in delimiting the field of vision of the mental eye, Bakker (1997: 59–70) uses the metaphor of the camera: 'The catalogue of nine killings that follows is thus a selection on the part of a consciousness that is watching the scene, zooming in as if it were a camera lens on items of particular salience and interest. Transitions from one selection to the next are marked by *de*, as is the movement from detail to detail within a selected catalogue item. The movement of story time is halted throughout to make possible the movement through performance time, in which "first" (*prōtos*) typically has the processual, nonreferential meaning "first in my account," rather than "first in the reality depicted."'

In the next stanza, the **zooming-out** begins and Sañjaya once again realises the context in which these items find themselves. He sees that the diverse weapons (**54a**) are dropped by warriors who now lie on the ground (**54b**):

nānā-vidha-āni	*śastra-āṇi*	*vi-sṛj-ya*	*pat-ita-ā*	*nara-āḥ* ||
various-kind	weapon	having-dropped-away	fallen	man
-ACC.PL.N	-ACC.PL.N	-ABS	-NOM.PL.M	-NOM.PL.M

‘Various kinds of weapons having dropped away—the men fell’

The description begins with the weapons, then Sañjaya sees what happened to them (they were dropped—*visṛjya*) and finally we are informed who is the agent (*patitā narāḥ*). Although syntactically the prominence is placed at the weapons, while the viewpoint changes, the prominence changes too to be placed at the concept of the warriors at whom Sañjaya begins to look. One gets an impression that only now did he truly realise that those who dropped their weapons were killed died in the battle. He still hopes that maybe they are alive (**54c**):

jīvanta	*iva*	*dṛśyante*
living-NOM.PL.M	as.if	appear-3PL.PRS.MID

‘As if living they appear—’

but he immediately realises that they are dead (**54d**):

gata-sattvā	*mahā-rathāḥ* ||
departed-life-NOM.PL.M	great-chariot-warrior NOM.PL.M

‘lifeless, the great warriors.’[16]

They are dead because they are awfully wounded. Now Sañjaya sees their wounds (**55ac**):

gadā-vimathit-āiḥ	*gātr-āiḥ*	*musala-īḥ*	*bhinna-mastak-āḥ* |
mace-crushed-INS.PL.N	limb-INS.PL.N	club-INS.PL.M	smashed-skull-NOM.PL.M

‘With limbs crushed by maces, and with heads smashed with clubs’

gaja-vāji-ratha-kṣuṇṇ-āḥ
elephant-horse-chariot-crushed-nom.pl.m

‘By elephants, horses, and chariots—squashed.’

---

[16] 6.96.54: ‘Having dropped their diverse weapons, those mighty men were lying on the ground lifeless, looking as if alive.’ The prominence is again placed at the fact that the weapons are dropped by the warriors. The word order in last two verses (54cd) is reversed, thus the order of Sañjaya’s thinking is lost.

The prominence is placed on the causes of wounds (maces, clubs, elephants, horses, chariots) probably to make the recipient realise how terrible wounds a certain kind of weapon, animal or vehicle can inflict. In the linguistic description, we simply have a series of passive participles—'crushed', 'smashed', 'squashed' (*vimathita*, *bhinna*, *kṣuṇṇa*)—but these are the triggers for imagination.

The **zoom-out** continues. Sañjaya sees where the warriors lie (**55d**):

śī-erate	*sma*	*nar-āḥ*	*kṣiti-au* ||
lie.down-3PL.PRS.MID	EMPH	man-NOM.PL.M	earth-LOC.SG.F

'—the men lay upon the earth.'[17]

Thus, he comes back to the starting point of his description, i.e. to the battlefield (in 47a: *raṇe cārūṇi cāpāni*), but now he sees that the dead bodies of horses, men and elephants cover the whole earth (**ultimate zoom-out**, **56**):

6.96.56

tathā	*eva*	*aśva-nṛ-nāg-ānām*	*śarīra-aiḥ*	*vi-ba-bhau*	*tadā* |
thus	indeed	horse-man-elephant	body	shine	then
		-GEN.PL.M	-INS.PL.N	-3PL.PERF.ACT	

'Thus indeed, with the bodies of horses, men, and elephants the earth shone then,'

saṃ-channa-ā	*vasudhāØ*	*rājanØ*	*parvata-aiḥ*	*iva*	*sarva-taḥ* ||
covered	earth	O-king	mountain	as.if	everywhere
-NOM.SG.F	-NOM.SG.F	-VOC.SG.M	-INS.PL.M		

'The earth was covered, O king, as if with mountains, everywhere.'[18]

The order of sentence reflects the order of moving away from the earth. We see the dead bodies, then their multitude covering the earth. The comparison of the bodies to the hills that cover the earth implies that now Sañjaya is so far away from it that he can no longer perceive differences between these bodies. It should be noted that time seems to speed up between the zoom-out and the ultimate-zoom out.

Now it seems to slow again. Sañjaya comes very close to the ground and begins to look at the weapons (**zoom-in**, **57–58ab**):

---

17 6.96.55: 'Men were lying on the ground, squashed by elephants, horses and chariots, with their bodies crushed with maces and their heads smashed with clubs.' The prominence is again on agent.

18 6.96.55: 'And the earth, covered with the bodies of horses, men and elephants, appeared, Your Majesty, as if it was covered with hills.' In the translation the description once again begins with the subject, namely the earth, which results in the loss of the dynamism present in the original, where the sequence reflects the order in which Sañjaya perceives the battlefield.

6.96.57

samare	*patita-aiḥ*	*ca-eva*	*śakti-ṛṣṭi-śara-tomara-aiḥ* |
battle-LOC.SG.M	fallen-INS.PL.M	and-indeed	spear-javelin-arrow-lance-INS.PL.M

‘On the battlefield, with fallen spears, javelins, arrows, and lances’

nistriṃśa-aiḥ	*paṭṭiśa-aiḥ*	*prāsa-aiḥ*	*ayas-k*unta-aiḥ	*paraś*vadha-aiḥ ||
sword	spear	dart	iron-lance	battle-axe
-INS.PL.M	-INS.PL.M	-INS.PL.M	-INS.PL.M	-INS.PL.M

‘with swords, sharp-edged spears, iron lances, and battle-axes’

6.96.58ab

parigha-aiḥ	*bhiṇḍip*āla-aiḥ	*ca*	*śatagh*nī-bhiḥ	ca	*māri*ṣa ||
iron-club	small javelin	and	hundred-slayer	and	O-noble-lord
-ins.pl.M	-ins.pl.M		-iNS.PL.F		VOC.SG.M

‘with iron club, small javelins, and śataghni missiles, my lord’

He also sees the bodies of the dead warriors (**zoom-out**, **58c**)

śarīra-aiḥ	*śastra-bhinna-aiḥ*	*ca*
body-INS.PL.N	weapon-lacerated-INS.PL.N	and

‘and with bodies lacerated by weapons’

And again, gets the global vision of the whole earth (**ultimate zoom-out**, **58d**)

sam-ā-stīr-y-ata	*medinīØ*
completely-covered-3SG.IMPF.MID	earth-NOM.SG.F

‘the earth was strewn’

Time speeds up. Let me note that now, in these two stanzas (57–58), Sañjaya just enumerates the kinds of weapons, he neither describes them, nor the lacerated bodies of the warriors. It is a more neutral description of the battlefield than the previous one (55–56) and situation is just described from two points of view: of someone who stands on the earth and of someone who is high above it. It is as if Sañjaya comes back to his role of the cameraman and psychological balance, well, war is war, and he has his job to do.

Now the next **zoom-in** begins (time again slows). Sañjaya comes back to look at dying and suffering warriors (**59ac**):

6.92.59ac

vi-śabda-aiḥ	*alpa-śabda-aiḥ*	*ca*	*śoṇita-ogha-pari-pluta-aiḥ*
loud-noise/without noise	small-noise	and	blood-flood-overflowed
-INS.PL.M	-INS.PL.M		-INS.PL.M

‘With loud cries/In the silence and faint sounds, and bathed in floods of blood’

gata-asu-bhiḥ	*amitra-ghnaØ*
departed-life-INS.PL.M	enemy-slayer-VOC.SG.M

‘With the lifeless [bodies], O slayers of enemies,’

And now, as if immediately, he zooms-out and sees the whole earth (**ultimate zoom-out**, **59d**)

vi-ba-bhau	*nicitā*	*mahī*
was-3SG.PERF.ACT	heaped up-NOM.SG.F	earth-NOM.SG.F

‘the was heaped up.’[19]

It is as if Sañjaya could not believe what he sees. As if he wanted to run away and get a more soothing view. But he cannot do that. The story must go on.

So Sañjaya again comes closer (**zoom-in**) to see the lacerated bodies in more detail. The prominence is firstly placed on their hands and of arms:

6.96.60ab

sa-talattra-aiḥ	*sa-keyūra-aiḥ*	*bāhu-bhiḥ*	*candana-ukṣita-aiḥ* |
with-leather fence	with-bracelet	arm	sandalwood-anointed
-INS.PL.M	-INS.PL.M	-INS.PL.M	-INS.PL.M

‘With arms adorned with armlets and bracelets, smeared with sandal paste’

Then he sees something that resembles severed elephant trunks, only to realize that these are in fact the severed legs of the warriors:

6.96.60cd

hasti-hasta-upama-aiḥ	*chinna-aiḥ*	*ūru-bhiḥ*	*ca*	*tarasvin-ām*
elephant-hand-similar	cut	thigh	and	mighty
-INS.PL.M	-INS.PL.M	-INS.PL.M		-GEN.PL.M

‘and with thighs like elephant-trunks—severed—of the mighty [warriors],’

---

19 6.96.58: ‘The earth was covered with warriors bathed in blood, some in the silence of their death, others feebly moaning, slayer of enemies.’ The word order is reversed, and the prominence is placed of the earth.

Next, Sañjaya's attention turns to their heads, beautifully adorned, lying on the ground: (**61a–c**):

6.96.61a

baddha-cūḍāmaṇi-dhara-aiḥ	*śiro-bhiḥ*	*ca*	*sa-kuṇḍala-aiḥ*
bound-diadem-bearing-INS.PL.N	head-INS.PL.N	and	with-earring-INS.PL.N

'with heads bearing crest-jewels, and with earrings'

pātita-aiḥ […]
fallen-INS.PL.N

'fallen'

and looks into their their eyes (**61c**) (**ultimate zoom-in**):

vṛṣabha-ākṣa-āṇām
bull-eyed-GEN.PL.M

'of bull-eyed [warriors],'

It is enough to recall the large, beautiful eyes of a cow or a bull, fringed by eyelashes, now motionless and bulging, to feel the dread of the situation in which Sañjaya and his audience find themselves. If we realise that these are the eyes of our loved ones, the terror will increase even more.

So Sañjaya again uses his supernatural power of flying to see the whole earth (**ultimate zoom-out**, **61d**):

ba-bhau	*bhārataØ*	*medinīØ* ||
shine-3SG.PERF.ACT	O-Bhārata-VOC.SG.M	earth-NOM.SG.F

'shone, O Bhārata, the earth!'[20]

Now times speeds up even more quickly than it has been in the previous cases, the ultimate zoom-out takes place immediately after the ultimate zoom-in.

Is it because the view is so painful and terrifying?

---

20 6.96.59–60: 'Strewn with the arms of mighty the bull-eyed combatants, smeared with sandal paste, furnished with leather fences and bracelets, with their thighs like elephant trunks, and with their severed heads adorned with earrings and crest-jewels, the field of action presented a beautiful sight, descendant of Bhārata.' The prominence is partly preserved here in that the sentence begins with the concept of arms of the warriors, but the order Sañjaya looks at the warriors (arms, thighs, heads, eyes) that most probably frightens him is lost.

Then, we can imagine Sañjaya taking a deep breath and going back to earth, time slows down again. Sañjaya comes back to see the armour of the warriors (**zoom-in**, **62ab**):

6.92.62ab

kavaca-aiḥ	*śoṇita-ā-digdha-aiḥ*	*viprakīrṇa-aiḥ*	*ca*	*kāñcana-aiḥ* |
armor	blood-with-smeared	scattered	and	golden
-INS.PL.M	-INS.PL.M	-INS.PL.M		-INS.PL.M

‘With armors, smeared with blood and scattered all around, golden’

and again immediately zooms-out (**ultimate zoom-out**, **62cd**):

6.92.62cd

ra-rāj-a	*su-bhṛśaṃ*	*bhūmi-ḥ*	*śānta-arci-bhiḥ*	*iva*	*anala-aiḥ* ||
shine	very	earth	extinguished-flame	as.if	fire
-3SG.PERF.ACT	-intensely	-NOM.SG.F	-INS.PL.M		-INS.PL.M

‘The earth glistened brightly, as with fires whose flames had died down.’[21]

The order of sentence again reflects the order in which Sañjaya sees each item: the armour smeared with the blood, the fact that it is scattered around, then he sees its golden colour, and we can imagine that the glow of gold blinds so that he sees that all the earth is shining with it. Ultimate zoom-out takes place immediately after zoom-in. Time again speeds up.

In the last verse, the armour is compared to dying out flames of fires. Glow of the embers of fire moves and flickers, and in these terms the blood of the warriors is conceived which flows from their bodies and which floods their armours. And just as the glow of the embers will go out after some time, the warriors will eventually become dead, inert bodies and the earth will become dark and cold. This image evokes the concept of cremation, and the recipient is prompted to identify[22] the earth with universal cremation pyre. Such an image is really fearful. There is, however, another, totally opposite, feature of this image: it is beautiful, as beautiful are glowing embers.

In this way, the recipient is triggered to experience simultaneously opposing emotions: horror and delight. War may be conceptualised as a paradigmatic liminal phenomenon: situated at the threshold between life and death, order and chaos, it is

---

[21] 6.92.61: ‘Covered with blood-smeared golden armor scattered all around, the earth glistened brightly as if it was overspread with fires whose flames had died down.’ Here the prominence is preserved, except from that the recipient is informed about what happens to the armour (it covers something) immediately in the beginning of the sentence. Another difference is that in Sanskrit original, prominence is firstly placed on the armour itself, only then Sañjaya sees how it looks like and what happens to it.

[22] Such a conceptual identification is called blending (Fauconnier and Turner 2002).

marked by a fundamental ambivalence, being at once terrifying and enthralling. This duality—of evoking fear and repulsion while simultaneously exerting an irresistible fascination—exemplifies the very essence of liminal experience. These contradictory emotions are not conveyed through the description of Sanjaya's mental and psychical state but through shifts in prominence expressed in sentence structure and achieved through a change in viewpoint.

5 Conclusion

The above analysis of a short fragment of the *Mahābhārata* shows how the description is carefully construed in order to trigger imagination. The fact that its main recipient, king Dhṛtarāṣṭra, is blind has a significant impact on the way the war is told and allows for meeting the requirements of oral creativity. Sañjaya tries to describe it not only to report the war to the king (and to any other audience, us included, who is as blind as the king and must rely on the Sañjaya report), but also to make him see it happening: Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and all of us, can imagine it if we follow his gaze with our mental eye. In the narrated text, the linguistic layer is rather concise, and it is the sentence structure which is one of the most important means of expressing construal. When listening to the text, one cannot rewind to an earlier fragment or jump ahead; the words unfold sequentially, gradually building a comprehensive understanding of the scene.

Emotions which accompany listening are evoked not only by the terrible content of the description, but also by the change in prominence thanks to zoom-in and zoom-out strategies causing a change in prominence and the pace of time which in the zoom-in perspective slows down until the view becomes unbearable, so it accelerates rapidly to free us from these unbearable emotions.

A comparison of the Sanskrit original with the English translation (given in the footnotes) shows that in many cases the translation does not maintain Sanskrit order of words. I am aware that this is prevented by the requirements of the English syntax. However, the ramifications of this are significant. In most cases, the English translation builds scenes from the point of view of an external observer, not involved in the course of events depicted in them. In this way, the dynamics of the description is lost, and the descriptions of various objects begin to resemble a dispassionate list of human and material losses. Moreover, the emotional component is lost too. I am not a native English speaker, but I wonder if there are perhaps ways of expressing the dynamics of the original other than through word order. This issue raises more general questions about translation and what is its subject is it only the content of a given work, or also the way in which it is profiled (Tabakowska 1990; 1995; 2017).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the reviewers of my article very much for their valuable remarks. My sincere appreciation also goes to Professor Mikołaj Szymański for his kind consultation.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

Joanna Jurewicz https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9944-4140

Abbreviations

3	3rd person	M	masculine
ABS	absolutivus	mid	middle
ACC	accusative	N	neuter
ACT	active	NOM	nominative
EMP	hemphatic	PERF	perfect
F	feminine	PL	plural
GEN	genitive	PPP	past passive participle
IMPF	imperfect	PRS	present tense
INS	instrumental	SG	present
LOC	locative	VOC	vocative

References

Adluri, Vishva, ed. 2013. *Ways and Reasons for Thinking about the* Mahābhārata *as a Whole*. Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

Adluri, Vishva, and Joydeep Bagchee, eds. 2011. *Reading the Fifth Veda: Studies on the* Mahābhārata*: Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel*, Vol. 1. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Adluri, Vishva, and Joydeep Bagchee, eds. 2016. *Argument and Design. The Unity of the* Mahābhārata. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Adluri, Vishva, and Joydeep Bagchee, eds. 2018. *Philology and Criticism. A Guide to* Mahābhārata *Textual Criticism*. London and New York: Anthem Press.

Bakker, Egbert J. 1997. *Poetry in Speech: Orality and Homeric Discourse*. New York and London: Ithaca.

Bonifazi, Anna. 2008. 'Memory and Visualisation in Homeric Discourse Markers'. In *Orality, Literacy, Memory in the Ancient Greek and Roman World*, edited by E. Anne Mackay, 35–64. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Bonifazi, Anna. 2012. *Homer's Versicolored Fabric: The Evocative Power of Ancient Greek Epic Wordmaking*. Washington, DC: Harvard University Press.

Bonifazi Anna. 2016. 'Particles as Cues to Structuring in Serbocroatian and Early Greek Epic'. In *Oral Poetics and Cognitive Science*, edited by Mihailo Antovic and Cristóbal Pagán Cánovas, 125–147. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter.

Bonifazi, Anna, and David F. Elmer. 2012a. 'Composing Lines, Performing Acts: Clauses, Discourse Acts, and Melodic Units in a South Slavic Epic Song'. In *Orality, Literacy and Performance in the Ancient World*, edited by Elizabeth Minchin, 89–109. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Bonifazi, Anna, and David F. Elmer. 2012b. 'The Meaning of Melody: Remarks on the Performance-Based Analysis of Bosniac Epic Song'. In *Child's Children: Ballad Study and Its Legacies*, edited by Joseph Harris and Barbara Hillers, 293–309. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier.

Brockington, John L. 1998. *The Sanskrit Epics.* Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Cherniak, Alex. 2008–2009. Mahābhārata. *Book Six*. Bhīṣma. Translated by Alex Cherniak with a Foreword by Ranajit Guha. 2 vols. New York: New York University Press, JJC Foundation.

Dancygier, Barbara, Wei-lun Lu, and Arie Verhagen, eds. 2016. *Viewpoint and the Fabric of Meaning. Form and Use of Viewpoint Tools across Languages and Modalities*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter.

de Kreij, Mark. 2016. 'The Priming Act in Homeric Epic'. In *Oral Poetics and Cognitive Science*, edited by Mihailo Antović and Cristóbal Pagán Cánovas, 148–167. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter.

Ehrlich, Susan. 1990. *Point of View. A Linguistic Analysis of Literary Style*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Fauconnier, Gilles, and Mark Turner. 2002. *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*. New York: Basic Books.

Fitzgerald, James L. 2002. 'The Rāma Jāmadagnya "Thread" of the Mahābhārata: A New Survey of Rāma Jāmadagnya in the Pune Text'. In *Stages and Transitions: Temporal and Historical Frameworks in Epic and Purāṇic Literature. Proceedings of the Second Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas, August 1999*, edited by Mary Brockington, 89–132. Zagreb: Hrvatska Akademija Znanosti i Umjetnosti.

Fitzgerald, James L. 2003. 'The Many Voices of the *Mahābhārata*'. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 123 (4): 803–818.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. 'Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols'. In *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, 126–141. New York: Basic Books.

Hiltebeitel, Alf. 2001a. *Rethinking the* Mahābhārata. *A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Hiltebeitel, Alf. 2011b. 'Weighting Orality and Writing in the Sanskrit Epics'. In *Reading the Fifth Veda: Studies on the* Mahābhārata*: Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel*, Vol. 1, edited by Vishva Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, 3–30. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Hiltebeitel, Alf. 2011c. 'The Primary Process of the Hindu Epics'. In *Reading the Fifth Veda: Studies on the* Mahābhārata*: Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel*, Vol. 1, edited by Vishva Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, 31–48. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Hiltebeitel, Alf. 2011d. 'More Rethinking the *Mahābhārata*: Toward a Politics of Bhakti'. In *Reading the Fifth Veda: Studies on the* Mahābhārata*: Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel*, Vol. 1, edited by Vishva Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, 49–72. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Hiltebeitel, Alf. 2011e. 'On Reading Fitzgerald's Vyāsa'. In *Reading the Fifth Veda: Studies on the* Mahābhārata*: Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel*, Vol. 1, edited by Vishva Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, 332–364. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Jurewicz, Joanna. 2022. 'Reportaż z pola bitwy. Jak przekładać opisy bitwy w Mahabharacie'. *Przekładaniec. A Journal of Translation Studies* 45: 133–156.

Kudelska, Marta. 1995. *Bhagawad Gita*. Kraków: Oficyna Literacka.

Langacker, Ronald W. 2005. Wykłady z gramatyki kognitywnej. Translated by Henryk Kardela and Przemysław Łozowski. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej.

Langacker, Ronald W. 2008. *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Milewska, Iwona. 2012. 'The Mahabharata Epic, Its Translations and Its Influence on Polish Intellectual Circles and General Readers'. *Źródła Humanistyki Europejskiej* 5: 287–315.

Minchin, Elizabeth. 2001. *Homer and the Resources of Memory: Some Applications of Cognitive Theory to the Iliad and the Odyssey*. Oxford, New York.

Rucińska, Anna. 2002. *Bhagawadgita. Święta pieśń Pana*. Warszawa: Sawitri – Medium.

Sachse, Joanna. 1988. *Bhagawadgita, czyli Pieśń Pana*. Wrocław: Ossolineum.

Sachse, Joanna. 2019. *Bhagawadgita, czyli Pieśń Czcigodnego*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Studiów Klasycznych, Śródziemnomorskich i Orientalnych.

Simpson, Paul. 1993. *Language, Ideology and Point of View*. London and New York: Routledge.

Sukthankar, Vishnu Sitaram et al. 1927–1959. *Mahabharata*. 19 vols. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

Tabakowska, Elżbieta. 1993. *Językoznawstwo kognitywne a poetyka przekładu*. Translated by Agnieszka Pokojska. Kraków: Universitas.

Tabakowska, Elżbieta. 1995. *Gramatyka i Obrazowanie. Wprowadzenie do językoznawstwa kognitywnego*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.

Tabakowska, Elżbieta. 2005. 'Komunikowanie i poznawanie w językoznawstwie'. *Teksty Drugie* 1–2: 50–59.

Tabakowska, Elżbieta. 2009. *Tłumacząc się z tłumaczenia*. Kraków: Znak.

Tabakowska, Elżbieta. 2017. 'Obraz gramatyki i gramatyka obrazu'. *Przekładaniec* 35: 73–85.

Wiraszka, Łukasz. 2015. *Kategoria punktu widzenia w przekładzie ustnym z perspektywy językoznawstwa kognitywnego w relacji języki polski – język angielski*. Kraków: Universitas.

FOLIA ORIENTALIA—BIBLIOTHECA 2 (2025)
DOI 10.24425/for.2025.156879

Przemysław Szczurek
University of Wrocław, Poland | przemyslaw.szczurek@uwr.edu.pl

How to Translate an Epic Text Metrically When You Are Neither a Poet Nor a Professional Translator? A Few Remarks on Difficulties in Translating Book 9 (*Śalyaparvan*) of the *Mahābhārata*

Abstract This article offers a series of reflections on the author's experience translating extensive portions of the *Mahābhārata* into Polish, with particular attention to metrical challenges encountered in rendering Book 9 (*Śalyaparvan*). The discussion explores the impossibility of reproducing the quantity-based Sanskrit metres—such as *śloka*, *triṣṭubh*, and *jagatī*—within the Polish stress-based prosodic system, and proposes rhythmical equivalents drawn from Polish poetic traditions. These include trochaic octosyllabic lines, three-footed dactylic metres, and the eleven- and twelve-syllable verse patterns characteristic of Polish Romantic and children's poetry. By tracing metrical correspondences between classical Sanskrit verse and Polish literary rhythms, the author reveals how the act of translation becomes both a linguistic experiment and a cultural rediscovery, bridging ancient Indian poetics with deeply familiar patterns of Polish verse.

Keywords *Mahābhārata*, *Śalyaparvan*, Sanskrit metrics, Polish prosody, metrical translation, rhythmic equivalence, trochee, dactyl, amphibrach, Polish poetry, translation studies

1 Introduction

This article constitutes a series of reflections on my relatively brief and limited experience with translating the *Mahābhārata* (MBh) into Polish rather than a formal research study on the subject. It could even be described as a form of a research anecdote or a philological jest, particularly when considering certain Polish literary texts to which I will refer. Nevertheless, these texts have proven valuable in my efforts to produce a metrical translation of three books of the great ancient Indian epic, the *Mahābhārata* (around 4th Century BC—around 4th Century AD).

© 2025 The Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

As part of a collaborative project focused on preparing a Polish annotated translation of the so-called battle books of the *Mahābhārata*, also known as the Kurukṣetra books (MBh, Books 6–11), my specific responsibility was to translate approximately two-thirds of Book 9 (*Śalyaparvan*), encompassing chapters 1–32 and 54–64 (with the middle section, chapters 33–53, translated by Andrzej Babkiewicz). Additionally, I translated shorter Books 10 (*Sauptikaparvan*; 18 chapters) and 11 (*Strīparvan*; 27 chapters).

I initially began my work with a prose translation of Book 11. However, upon learning that Andrzej Babkiewicz had embarked on a metrical translation of his assigned sections of Books 6, 7, and 9, I found this approach both intriguing and intellectually stimulating. Recognizing the challenge it presented, I decided it was a worthwhile endeavour. Consequently, after some time, I abandoned my prose translation and restarted my work from the beginning, this time attempting to render the Sanskrit text metrically. This decision was made in a largely intuitive manner, despite my limited prior experience with translation.

It is worth noting that the initial inspiration for both Babkiewicz and, to some extent, for myself was Maria Krzysztof Byrski (1985), who rendered his Polish translation of the *Manusmṛti* (an ancient Indian legal and moral code) in eight-syllable lines, aiming to replicate the Sanskrit śloka of the original text.

2 Polish metrical translations of Sanskrit literature

In the course of the reflections presented in this text, it is worth noting that among Polish translations of Sanskrit literature, there already exists a number of metrical renditions. The authors of these translations—undoubtedly aware of the inherent difficulties arising from the impossibility of rendering the original metres of a quantity-based language into Polish—have made deliberate efforts to base their translations on rhythmic equivalents suited to the Polish language. This has primarily been achieved by ensuring a consistent number of syllables in each line of the translation, while also drawing on Polish accentual patterns. A few examples may serve to illustrate this point.[1]

In the early 20th century, Antoni Lange employed a paired line of eight and nine syllables (i.e. 8 + 9 syllables × 2) as a Polish equivalent of the Sanskrit eight-syllable śloka metre (*anuṣṭubh*; i.e. 4 × 8 syllables or 2 × 16 syllables) in his rhymed translation of the famous poem about Nala and Damayantī (*Nalopākhyāna*), which formally constitutes an episode of the *Mahābhārata* (MBh 3.50–78) (Lange 1906).[2]

Using a 9-syllable, 11-syllable, and (in the case of one canto) 12-syllable metre, characterised by a simple yet elevated language that preserves the melody and

1 A **survey** of Polish translations of Sanskrit literature is available on the website *Antologia literatury sanskryckiej*. Accessed 8 October 2025. http://www.indika.pl.

2 See also Mejor (2007: 231–290).

reflective tone of the originals, Andrzej Gawroński translated substantial portions of two classical Sanskrit *mahākāvyas* (i.e. great epic poems) by Aśvaghoṣa: *Buddhacarita* ('The Life of the Buddha') and *Saundarananda* ('The Handsome Nanda') (Gawroński 1926).[3] In the Polish translation, these metrical forms replace either the śloka (*anuṣṭubh*)—the most commonly employed metre in the Sanskrit originals—or, less frequently, the 11-syllable *upajāti*, or else 12-syllable *jagatī* metre.[4]

Selected excerpts from pre-war educational materials, such as Stanisław Schayer's *Indian Literature* (1936), also contain Polish translations from Sanskrit literature that illustrate discussions of particular literary works; among these, a number are likewise metrical translations.[5]

In his translation of seventy selected hymns from the *Ṛgveda*, Franciszek Michalski (1972) sought to convey the character of the original Vedic metres—such as *gāyatrī*, *anuṣṭubh*, *triṣṭubh*, and *jagatī*—by employing Polish metrical equivalents. To this end, he drew upon familiar patterns from the Polish literary tradition, using well-established syllabo-tonic verse forms, most notably lines of eight, eleven, and thirteen syllables.

Among the more than ten Polish translations of the *Bhagavadgītā*—most of which are rendered in prose or rhythmised prose—the translations by Anna Rucińska (2002), Babkiewicz (2011), and part of the translation by Byrski (songs 1–3; 2011) have been composed in metrical form.[6] In these, the original eight-syllable *śloka* is rendered using the Polish octosyllabic line, while the eleven-syllable *triṣṭubh* is translated with an eleven-syllable Polish verse, with careful attention paid to rhythm and regular syllabification. Joanna Sachse (2020), in her second translation of the *Bhagavadgītā*, consistently rendered the eight-syllable *śloka* in Polish nine-syllable lines, and the eleven-syllable *triṣṭubh* in thirteen-syllable lines, all while preserving the original four-*pāda* structure of each stanza.[7]

Using a consistent eight-syllable metre with a regular distribution of stresses, Rucińska (2014) translated Book 1 of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (known as the *Bālakāṇḍa*), thereby rendering the original śloka form.

Mariola Pigoniowa, in turn, rendered Canto I of Kālidāsa's *Kumārasaṁbhava* into rhythmic Polish hendecasyllables, echoing the dominant metrical form of the original—*upajāti*, which consists primarily of eleven-syllable lines. Notably, the final

---

3 See also Mejor (2007: 435–476).

4 In *Saundarananda*, Aśvaghoṣa also makes use of other metrical patterns such as *vasantatilakā*, *mandākrāntā*, and other more ornate lyrical metres.

5 See, for instance, the translation of selected hymns from the *Ṛgveda* (2,12; 5,85; 6,64; 3,33; 10,129) and from the *Atharvaveda* (6,136; 6,131), with certain variations in syllabic structure.

6 See also *Bhagavadgītā. Analiza gramatyczna i syntaktyczna, tłumaczenia, komentarze*. Accessed 8 October 2025. http://www.bhagavadgita.eu.

7 Szuwalska (2005) rendered the entirety of the *Bhagavadgītā* into Polish using a thirteen-syllable metrical line. This approach resulted in a systematic reduction of the original four *pādas* (metrical quarters) of the Sanskrit stanza—whether composed in the *śloka* or *triṣṭubh* metre—to predominantly three lines in the Polish rendition.

verse (stanza 60) was translated using a fifteen-syllable line, reflecting the Sanskrit original's use of the *mālinī* metre, which likewise comprises fifteen syllables (Pigoniowa 2021: 30–46).[8]

These and other instances of Polish translations of Sanskrit literature may serve as sources of inspiration for future translators.[9] In my own experience, however, I have encountered them (not only through deliberate research but also—perhaps more frequently—through the subconscious recognition of their echoes) in other works of Polish literature, i.e. in works that are now considered classics of Polish literature, as I shall examine below.

3 Metrical structures of the *Mahābhārata's* Book 9

In Book 9 of the *Mahābhārata*, which serves as an illustration of my metrical challenges, the text is composed in three distinct metrical forms:

1. The most prevalent epic metre, the *śloka*, a thirty-two-syllable stanza consisting of four *pādas* (quarters), each containing eight syllables.
2. The less frequently used *triṣṭubh* stanza, composed of forty-four syllables, with four *pādas* of eleven syllables each.

8 Among Polish scholarly works, there exist research studies addressing issues related to the translation of Sanskrit literary texts into Polish—both of a general (theoretical) and specific nature—although their number remains relatively limited. Translational reflections occasionally appear in the introductions to individual translations of Sanskrit works. Marlewicz (2002) presents personal reflections on the challenges faced by the Sanskrit translator. She notes that translating from Sanskrit is not merely a linguistic operation but rather an attempt to reconstruct a distant and often incomprehensible world. The translator must strike a balance between fidelity to the source text and the need to produce a communicative work in the target language—frequently without theoretical support or the possibility of consultation (and often without formal training in translation within the framework of Oriental studies). Using examples from three types of texts—hymns from the *Atharvaveda*, a philosophical treatise, and the love poetry of Amaru—she observes that translating Sanskrit requires not only linguistic competence but also intuition, imagination, and cultural awareness. The Sanskrit translator—often working in isolation—must independently shape their approach to the text, becoming both its interpreter and the author of a new version in the target language. See also Czekalska and Marlewicz (2005). Borowski's article (2022) offers an attempt to present alternative, non-European concepts of translation, using India as a case study. The author analyzes the differences between the understanding of translation in the Indian cultural context and in Western, Eurocentric models. He highlights the need to 'provincialize' translation studies—that is, to take into account other traditions of thinking about translation without imposing Western conceptual frameworks on them. Heszen (2024) provides an insightful analysis of the translation of ancient Greek and Latin metre into Polish, a language that lacks quantity-based prosody. The author proposes the concept of 'metrical transposition'—the translation of rhythm through its functional equivalents in the target system—and outlines a typology of translational strategies: generic, isometric, mimetic, and adaptive. Although the article focuses on classical metrical patterns, the issues and strategies discussed are analogous to those encountered in Sanskrit. Sanskrit metres are also highly rhythmical and difficult to reproduce directly in Polish. The article offers useful tools for reflecting on rhythm, musicality, and types of translation, thus supporting conscious translational choices between fidelity and idiomatic expression.

9 See Mejor (2007).

3. The rarely occurring stanza *jagatī*, which consists of forty-eight syllables, structured in four *pādas* of twelve syllables each.

Each of these metrical stanzas consisting of four *pādas* has its origins in Vedic prosody. The *śloka*, the dominant stanza in the epic, is derived from the Vedic *anuṣṭubh*, while *triṣṭubh* and *jagatī* retain their Vedic names and general structures. Typically, the length of a given stanza dictates the length of a sentence or statement. Each complete metrical unit is divided into two halves, with each half further subdivided into two *pādas*. In simplified terms, the *śloka* follows an eight-syllable pattern, the *triṣṭubh* an eleven-syllable pattern, and the *jagatī* a twelve-syllable pattern.

Since Sanskrit is a quantitative language in which vowel length plays a crucial role, its metrical system—similarly to that of ancient Greek and Latin poetry—is based on syllable length. However, the prosodic structure of the epic *śloka* is relatively flexible. The first four syllables of each *pāda* are metrically free, meaning they may be either long or short. The most commonly occurring metrical pattern follows this scheme:[10]

> ⏓ ⏓ ⏓ ⏓ ⏑ – – ⏓ ' ⏓ ⏓ ⏓ ⏓ ⏑ – ⏑ ⏓ /
> ⏓ ⏓ ⏓ ⏓ ⏑ – – ⏓ ' ⏓ ⏓ ⏓ ⏓ ⏑ – ⏑ ⏓ //

The opening two stanzas of Book 9 serve as an illustrative example of the *śloka* metre.

> (*janamejaya uvāca:*)
> *evaṁ nipātite karṇe samare savyasācinā /*
> *alpāvaśiṣṭāḥ kuravaḥ kim akurvata vai dvija //*
> *udīryamāṇaṁ ca balaṁ dṛṣṭvā rājā suyodhanaḥ /*
> *pāṇḍavaiḥ prāptakālaṁ ca kiṁ prāpadyata kauravaḥ //* (MBh 9,1.1–2)

It can be observed that the epic *śloka* is a highly flexible metrical form, to the extent that it does not always strictly conform to its own loose structural pattern. The only consistent element is the adherence of the final four syllables of each hemistich, or of the even *pādas*, to the expected scheme. However, a detailed analysis of Sanskrit metrics falls beyond the scope of this paper.

My Polish metrical translation is, of course, merely an attempt—successful to varying degrees—at imitation, aiming to encourage the reader to perceive the rhythm of Sanskrit epic poetry in an approximate and highly conventional manner. Unlike Sanskrit, Polish is no longer a language in which vowel length serves as a fundamental phonetic feature. Instead, its accentuation is based on the stronger pronunciation of stressed syllables, achieved through a pressive or expiratory approach, which involves increasing the force of exhalation when articulating a syllable within a word or

---

10 See, e.g., van Buitenen (1973: XXXVIII) and Sellmer (2015: 28–31).

sentence. Consequently, it is not possible to precisely replicate the rhythm of Sanskrit metre, despite its relative flexibility in the epic. A Polish stanza must, by necessity, be structured according to the metrical conventions of the Polish language, and Polish metric verses are classified as syllabotonic ones.

4 Searching for Polish rhythmic equivalents: trochaic pattern

While searching for a Polish equivalent of the octosyllabic metre, I was surprised to discover it most prominently in a vast number of children's poems, particularly those by renowned Polish poets such as Aleksander Fredro (1793–1876), Maria Konopnicka (1842–1910), Julian Tuwim (1894–1953), and Jan Brzechwa (1898–1966), and moreover in the works of Poland's national bards, Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) and Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849). The recollection of childhood memories and repeated readings of these widely popular poems surfaced almost involuntarily. Large portions of these texts are not only familiar to me but are also deeply embedded in the collective memory of many Polish adults of my generation and beyond, passed down through successive generations. Many individuals likely still recall these poems quite well, with some even remembering entire passages by heart.

Recognizing in adulthood that a significant portion of these beloved poems were composed in octosyllabic verse was as astonishing to me as the revelation experienced by Monsieur Jourdain, the protagonist of Molière's comedy *The Bourgeois Gentleman* (*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*), upon realizing that he had been speaking prose for over forty years of his life without knowing it. As I further examined this metrical pattern, I found that the majority of Polish octosyllabic lines in children's poetry are structured according to the Polish equivalent of the ancient Greek and Latin metrical foot known as the trochee (Gr. *trochaios*, Lat. *trochaeus*). In classical Greek and Latin metrics, the trochee consists of two syllables: a long (heavy) syllable followed by a short (light) one (¯ ‿). In Polish prosody, this metrical foot is realized as a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one (–́ – / Ss). A sequence of four such trochees forms an octosyllabic line.

It is likely due to the inherent simplicity of this trochaic-based metre that it has become so prevalent in Polish rhyming and rhythmic poetry for children. Among the numerous inspirations I drew from children's poetry for my translation, I will highlight a few of the most well-known examples.

> Rada małpa, że się śmieli,
> Kiedy mogła udać człeka,
> Widząc panią raz w kąpieli,
> Wlazła pod stół – cicho czeka. […][11]

---

11 Aleksander Fredro, 'Małpa w kąpieli' ['Monkey in the Bath'], vv. 1–4. https://wolnelektury.pl/. See also 'Osiołkowi w żłoby dano', 'Dwa koguty', 'Wieczerza z gwoździa (Cygan i baba)'.

O większego trudno zucha,
Jak był Stefek Burczymucha.
– Ja nikogo się nie boję!
Choćby niedźwiedź ... to dostoję! […][12]

„Żeby kózka nie skakała,
Toby nóżki nie złamała"
Prawda!
Ale gdyby nie skakała,
Toby smutne życie miała.
Prawda?[13]

Biega, krzyczy pan Hilary:
„Gdzie są moje okulary?"
Szuka w spodniach i w surducie,
W prawym bucie, w lewym bucie. […][14]

Samochwała w kącie stała
I wciąż tak opowiadała:
– Zdolna jestem niesłychanie,
Najpiękniejsze mam ubranie,
Moja buzia tryska zdrowiem,
Jak coś powiem, to już powiem, […][15]

Na straganie w dzień targowy
Takie słyszy się rozmowy:
– Może pan się o mnie oprze,
Pan tak więdnie, panie Koprze.
– Cóż się dziwić, mój Szczypiorku,
Leżę tutaj już od wtorku! […][16]

---

12 'Stefek Burczymucha' (Konopnicka 2018). See also 'Podróż na bocianie', 'Pranie', 'Krasnoludki są na świecie', 'Parasol', 'Staszek w lesie', 'Skrucha Józi', 'Zamiary Staszka', 'Pan Zielonka', 'Sposób na laleczkę', 'O Janku wędrowniczku'.

13 'Skakanka' ['Jumping Rope'] (Tuwim 2024).

14 'Okulary' ['Spectacles'] (Tuwim 2024). See also 'Taniec', 'O panu Tralalińskim', 'Warszawa', 'Ptasie plotki'. Also, some fables (treated as a literary genre) by the prominent 18th-century Polish poet Ignacy Krasicki (1735–1801) are composed in eigth-syllable metre. Among them is a fable titled 'Czapla, ryby i rak' ['Heron, fish and Crayfish'], which has its origin in an Indian tale included in the Sanskrit fable collection *Pañcatantra* (see Urbańska 2016: 284–292).

15 'Samochwała' ['A Braggart'] (Brzechwa 2022).

16 'Na straganie' ['At a market stall'] (Brzechwa 2022). See also 'Skarżypyta', 'Kłamczucha', 'Kwoka', 'Koziołeczek', 'Opowiedział dzięcioł sowie', 'Chrząszcz', 'Hipopotam', 'Sum', 'Grzebień i szczotka', 'Tańcowała igła z nitką', 'Wielbłąd', 'Małpy', 'Kłótnia rzek', 'Atrament', 'Szelmostwa Lisa Witalisa'. See also Juliusz Słowacki, 'O Janku, co psom szył buty'.

The eight-syllable metre based on the trochee, occasionally featuring single rhythmic variations, is not exclusively found in children's poetry. It is also employed in poetry intended for adults. Several notable examples serve as compelling illustrations of this phenomenon and are particularly significant for Polish reader, for example: Mikołaj Rej, *Krótka rozprawa między trzemi osobami, Panem, Wójtem a Plebanem*; Fredro, *Zemsta*; Mickiewicz, 'Pani Twardowska', or Adam Asnyk, 'Między nami nic nie było'.

> […]
> Miły wójcie, cóż się dzieje,
> Aboć się ten ksiądz z nas śmieje!
> Mało śpiewa, wszytko dzwoni,
> Msza nie była jako łoni. […][17]
>
> Między nami nic nie było!
> Żadnych zwierzeń, wyznań żadnych!
> Nic nas z sobą nie łączyło —
> Prócz wiosennych marzeń zdradnych; […][18]

Polish eight-syllable poetry is structured around both rhythm and rhyme. In contrast, poetic texts from ancient India, including Sanskrit epics, do not rely on rhyme. Consequently, when approximating the mood of an epic stanza in translation, the primary challenge lies in preserving its rhythmic qualities. In my translation of the *Mahābhārata*, specifically Books 11, 10, and parts of Book 9 (translated in this order), the eight-syllable structure was primarily rendered using four Polish trochaic equivalents, although occasional rhythmic variations occur within this framework. These variations may arise due to the necessity of selecting appropriate vocabulary or may stem from the translator's own limitations in experience and poetic skill. For instance, in a smaller number of cases, the Polish equivalent of a spondee (originally:— —) appears instead of the expected trochaic pattern (Pol. –́ – / Ss), resulting in two consecutive stressed syllables (Polish equivalent: –́ –́ = SS). The following example is taken from the beginning of my translation of Book 9.

> *janamejaya uvāca*
> *evaṁ nipātite karṇe samare savyasācinā /*
> *alpāvaśiṣṭāḥ kuravaḥ kim akurvata vai dvija //*
> *udīryamāṇaṁ ca balaṁ dṛṣṭvā rājā suyodhanaḥ /*
> *pāṇḍavaiḥ prāptakālaṁ ca kiṁ prāpadyata kauravaḥ //*
> *etad icchāmy ahaṁ śrotuṁ tad ācakṣva dvijottama /*
> *na hi tṛpyāmi pūrveṣāṁ śṛṇvānaś caritaṁ mahat //*

---

17 Mikołaj Rej, *Krótka rozprawa między trzemi osobami, Panem, Wójtem a Plebanem* [*A Short Discourse between Three Persons, the Lord, the Village Head, and the Parish Priest*], vv. 31–34. https://wolnelektury.pl/.

18 Adam Asnyk, 'Między nami nic nie było' ['There Was Nothing between Us'], vv. 1–4. https://wolnelektury.pl/.

vaiśaṁpāyana uvāca
tataḥ karṇe hate rājan dhārtarāṣṭraḥ suyodhanaḥ /
bhṛśaṁ śokārṇave magno nirāśaḥ sarvato 'bhavat //
hā karṇa hā karṇa iti śocamānaḥ punaḥ punaḥ /
kṛcchrāt svaśibiraṁ prāyād dhataśeṣair nṛpaiḥ saha //
sa samāśvāsyamāno 'pi hetubhiḥ śāstraniścitaiḥ /
rājabhir nālabhac charma sūtaputravadhaṁ smaran // (MBh 9,1.1–6)

Dźanamedźaja rzekł:
1: Kiedy Karnę w taki sposób Leworęczny zabił w starciu,
cóż, braminie, uczyniła niewielka Kaurawów resztka?
2: Gdy zobaczył Sujodhana król, że armię swą zbierają
Pandawowie, cóż przedsięwziął Kaurawa w stosownej chwili?
3: Przedstaw mi to, pragnę wiedzieć, o najlepszy wśród braminów,
nie mam bowiem dość, gdy słyszę o mych przodków wielkich czynach.
Waiśampajana rzekł:
4: Po zabójstwie Karny, królu, Sujodhana, Dhrytarasztry
syn wpadł w wielkie morze smutku, nadziei nie mając znikąd.
5: Lamentując w taki sposób stale: „Karno, och, ach, Karno!",
z trudem dotarł do obozu z władcami ocalałymi.
6: Choć koili go królowie opiniami z ksiąg prawości,
nie znalazł pociechy myśląc o woźnicy syna mordzie.

5 Dactylic inspirations

During my work on the translation—specifically, after completing the translations of Books 10 and 11 but before beginning Book 9—I recalled a poem from my childhood that I believe was widely known among children of my generation. This poem, 'Pan Maluśkiewicz' ['Mr. Maluśkiewicz'] by Tuwim, frequently employs a distinct rhythmic pattern. In this structure, two equivalents of the ancient Greek dactyl (Gr. *dáktylos*; Lat. dactylus; ¯˘˘) appear consecutively, followed by a single equivalent of a trochee. In metrical theory, this form is classified as three-footed dactylic catalectic verse (in Polish: *trójstopowiec daktyliczny katalektyczny*), in which the first, fourth, and seventh syllables are stressed (–́ – – –́ – – –́ – / SssSssSs). As illustrated by 'Pan Maluśkiewicz', it is not always necessary to adhere rigidly to this pattern when selecting words to maintain the poem's rhythm; however, this structure predominates.

Był sobie pan Maluśkiewicz
Najmniejszy na świecie chyba.
Wszystko już poznał i widział
Z wyjątkiem wieloryba.
Pan Maluśkiewicz był – tyci,
Tyciuśki jak ziarnko kawy,

A oprócz tego podróżnik,
A oprócz tego ciekawy. […][19]

A highly significant work in Polish literature—though often underestimated by high school students—is one of the most renowned masterpieces of Polish Romanticism: *Konrad Wallenrod*, a poetic novel by Adam Mickiewicz (first published in 1828). A section of this work, titled 'Powieść Wajdeloty' ['Wajdelota's Story'], served as an important source of rhythmic inspiration for me. 'Powieść Wajdeloty' follows the structure of three-footed dactylic catalectic verse in the second part of each line, while the first part is composed in a seven-syllable metre followed by a caesura.

Skąd Litwini wracali? [' 7] Z nocnej wracali wycieczki [8],
Wieźli łupy bogate, ['] w zamkach i cerkwiach zdobyte.
Tłumy brańców niemieckich z powiązanemi rękami,
Ze stryczkami na szyjach, biegną przy koniach zwycięzców:
Poglądają ku Prusom – i zalewają się łzami,
Poglądają na Kowno – i polecają się Bogu. […][20]

When composing 'Powieść Wajdeloty', Mickiewicz deliberately sought to evoke the epic metre of ancient Greek and later Roman/Latin literature—namely, dactylic hexametre—thus drawing inspiration from such literary masterpieces as the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid*. In doing so, he became the first poet to introduce the so-called Polish hexametre into Polish poetry. This same metre was later employed by another distinguished 19th-century poet, Cyprian Kamil Norwid (1821–1883), in his renowned work *Bema pamięci żałobny-rapsod* [*A Funeral Rhapsody in Memory of General Bem*]. Bearing this literary tradition in mind while translating Book 9 of the *Mahābhārata*, and wishing—however symbolically and imperfectly—to pay homage to both the great poets of antiquity and the masters of 19th-century Polish literature in my metrical rendering of the epic *śloka*, I chose to translate a significant portion of Book 9 using octosyllabic, three-footed dactylic catalectic verse. However, as was also the case in earlier instances, various constraints—most often the demands of vocabulary selection and my own limited experience as a translator—prevented me from adhering strictly to this metre, leading to occasional rhythmic variations.

saṁjaya uvāca
tataḥ sainyās tava vibho madrarājapuraskr̥tāḥ /
punar abhyadravan pārthān vegena mahatā raṇe //
pīḍitās tāvakāḥ sarve pradhāvanto raṇotkaṭāḥ /
kṣaṇenaiva ca pārthāṁs te bahutvāt samaloḍayan //
te vadhyamānāḥ kurubhiḥ pāṇḍavā nāvatasthire /

19 Julian Tuwim, 'Pan Maluśkiewicz', vv. 1–8. https://wolnelektury.pl/.
20 Adam Mickiewicz, 'Powieść Wajdeloty'. In *Konrad Wallenrod*. https://wolnelektury.pl/.

nivāryamāṇā bhīmena paśyatoḥ kr̥ṣṇapārthayoḥ //
tato dhanaṁjayaḥ kruddhaḥ kr̥paṁ saha padānugaiḥ /
avākirac charaugheṇa kr̥tavarmāṇam eva ca //
śakuniṁ sahadevas tu sahasainyam avārayat /
nakulaḥ pārśvataḥ sthitvā madrarājam avaikṣata //
[…]
tataḥ samabhavad yuddhaṁ saṁsaktaṁ tatra tatra ha /
tāvakānāṁ pareṣāṁ ca saṁgrāmeṣv anivartinām //
tatra paśyāmahe karma śalyasyātimahad raṇe /
yad ekaḥ sarvasainyāni pāṇḍavānām ayudhyata //
vyadr̥śyata tadā śalyo yudhiṣṭhirasamīpataḥ /
raṇe candramaso 'bhyāśe śanaiścara iva grahaḥ // (MBh 9,15.1–5, 8–10)

Sańdźaja rzekł:
1. Armia twa wówczas, o mężny,['] z dowódcą swym, królem Madrów,
znów popędziła na Parthów ['] z wielkim zapałem bitewnym.
2. Choć naciskane, twe wojska pijane bitwą pędziły
i Parthów w mig rozbijały dzięki przewadze liczebnej.
3. Przez Kurów dziesiątkowane nie mogły trwać wojska Pandów,
choć Bhima ich powstrzymywał na oczach Kryszny i Parthy.
4. W gniewie więc Skarbów Zdobywca Krypę i Krytawarmana,
a także ich sprzymierzeńców zasypał strzał całą chmarą.
5. Wraz z wojskiem swym Sahadewa naprzeciw szedł Śakuniemu,
na flance stojąc Nakula na króla Madrów spoglądał.
[…]
8. Wszędzie toczyła się walka wojsk twoich i wojsk ich wrogów,
i nikt z nich w pobliżu wroga stojąc, nie stchórzył w tych starciach.
9. Oglądaliśmy w tej walce Śalji nadludzkie wyczyny,
gdy walczył sam jeden przeciw wszystkim żołnierzom Pandawów.
10. Śalja wyglądał w tej chwili – gdy blisko był Judhiszthiry –
jakby to Saturn przyćmiewał księżyc, znajdując się przy nim.

As a brief aside, it is worth mentioning that the oldest Polish religious song—and simultaneously the earliest known Polish poetic work—'Bogurodzica' ['God's Mother'], dating from approximately the 13th century, holds particular interest in this context. 'Bogurodzica' served as Poland's earliest national anthem for several centuries. Without delving into a detailed analysis of this foundational work of Polish literature, it is noteworthy that the first two lines (excluding the first quarter of the second line) along with several subsequent lines, are composed in eight-syllable verse. Furthermore, in its recited form—given that the poem was frequently sung—the first two lines follow a metrical pattern of two dactyls and one trochee, while a few other octosyllabic lines consist of four trochees. Thus, this religious poem or song exhibits two distinct rhythmic patterns, both of which I reference in my translation of the *Mahābhārata*.

Bogurodzica dziewica, Bogiem sławiena Maryja.
U twego syna, Gospodzina, Matko zwolena, Maryja!
[…]
A na świecie zbożny pobyt,
Po żywocie rajski przebyt.
Kyrieleison.[21]

6 Translating the *triṣṭubh* and the *jagatī*

For both content-related and stylistic reasons, more complex verse structures occasionally appear in Book 9. One such structure is the *triṣṭubh*, a stanza consisting of 44 syllables divided into four quarters (*pādas*) of eleven syllables each. In the *Mahābhārata*, the *triṣṭubh* (the most prevalent and significant metre of the Ṛgvedic hymns, particularly those dedicated to Indra) most commonly follows the pattern outlined below:[22]

⏓ – ⏑ – – ⏑ ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑

⏓ – ⏑ – – ⏑ ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ /
⏓ – ⏑ – – ⏑ ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑

⏓ – ⏑ – – ⏑ ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ //

See, for example:

saṁdrāvyamāṇaṁ tu balaṁ pareṣāṁ
parītakalpaṁ vibabhau samantāt /
naivāvatasthe samare bhṛśaṁ bhayād
vimardamānaṁ tu parasparaṁ tadā //
tataḥ prabhagnā sahasā mahācamūḥ
sā pāṇḍavī tena narādhipena /
diśaś catasraḥ sahasā pradhāvitā
gajendravegaṁ tam apārayantī //
dṛṣṭvā ca tāṁ vegavatā prabhagnāṁ
sarve tvadīyā yudhi yodhamukhyāḥ /
apūjayaṁs tatra narādhipaṁ taṁ
dadhmuś ca śaṅkhāñ śaśisaṁnikāśān //
śrutvā ninādaṁ tv atha kauravāṇāṁ
harṣād vimuktaṁ saha śaṅkhaśabdaiḥ /
senāpatiḥ pāṇḍavasṛñjayānāṁ
pāñcālaputro na mamarṣa roṣāt // (MBh 9,19.7–10)

[21] 'Bogurodzica', vv. 1–2, 9–11. https://wolnelektury.pl/.
[22] See van Buitenen (1973: XXXVIII–XXXIX).

As observed, *triṣṭubh* verses in the *Mahābhārata*, similar to śloka, do not always adhere strictly to the aforementioned 'theoretical' pattern, as metric variations can occur within individual *pādas*.

The primary inspiration for employing the rhythm of eleven-syllable metre in my Polish translation stemmed from a poem by the 19th-century master of comedy, Aleksander Fredro, titled 'Paweł i Gaweł' ['Paweł and Gaweł']. This poem was widely popular during my childhood and was included in the primary school curriculum as a required reading. A further association soon emerged—namely, a poem that extended beyond primary school education: 'Niepewność' ['Uncertainty'] by Mickiewicz, which gained popularity in Polish culture through a popular musical adaptation by Marek Grechuta.

Moreover, it became evident that the eleven-syllable verse was highly favoured by Polish poets, particularly in the 19th century, as exemplified by two major works of Polish literature: *Konrad Wallenrod* (for the most part) by Mickiewicz and *Beniowski* by Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849).[23] The structural arrangement of Polish poems in this metre typically features a caesura after the fifth syllable, followed by six additional syllables.

Paweł i Gaweł ['] w jednym stali domu,
Paweł na górze, ['] a Gaweł na dole;
Paweł spokojny, nie wadził nikomu,
Gaweł najdziksze wymyślał swawole. […][24]

Gdy cię nie widzę, ['] nie wzdycham, nie płaczę,
Nie tracę zmysłów, ['] kiedy cię zobaczę;
Jednakże gdy cię długo nie oglądam,
Czegoś mi braknie, kogoś widzieć żądam;
I tęskniąc sobie zadaję pytanie:
Czy to jest przyjaźń? czy to jest kochanie? […][25]

Za panowania króla Stanisława
Mieszkał ubogi szlachcic na Podolu,
Wysoko potem go wyniosła sława;
Szczęścia miał mało w życiu, więcej bolu; […][26]

In Book 9 of the *Mahābhārata*, passages composed in *triṣṭubh* stand out from other battle descriptions, serving as a formal distinction at the climax of significant battle narratives. One such instance is the final confrontation between Yudhiṣṭhira and

23 See also Słowacki, 'O języku'.
24 Fredro, 'Paweł i Gaweł', vv. 1–4. https://wolnelektury.pl/.
25 Adam Mickiewicz, 'Niepewność', vv. 1–6. https://wolnelektury.pl/.
26 Juliusz Słowacki, 'Beniowski', vv. 1–4. https://wolnelektury.pl/.

Śalya—the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army on the eighteenth and final day of the great battle—which culminates in Śalya's death (MBh 9,16.7–51, 86–87). The use of this metre, distinct from the more commonly employed śloka, imbues the description of the final battle with a sense of uniqueness and solemnity.

Shortly thereafter, another passage in *triṣṭubh* describes the heroic struggle of Śālva, the commander of the *mlecchas* (non-Aryan or barbarian warriors), who fought atop a massive elephant, wreaking havoc upon the Pāṇḍava forces. However, he was ultimately struck down, along with his elephant, by Dhṛṣṭadyumna (the commander-in-chief of the Pāṇḍava army) wielding his club, after which Yuyudhāna Sātyaki immediately decapitated the *mleccha* commander (MBh 9,19.3–26). Likewise, the final moments of another struggle of great warriors, i.e., Sahadeva's battle with Śakuni, culminating in Śakuni's fall, are also rendered in *triṣṭubh* (MBh 9,27.55–63). Furthermore, this metre is employed in the depiction of the barbaric act of kicking Duryodhana in the head after he had been felled in an unchivalrous manner by Bhīma during their club duel (MBh 9,58.9–13), with the metrical choice accentuating the gravity of the moment.

See, for example:

tatas tu śaktiṁ rucirogradaṇḍāṁ; maṇipravālojjvalitāṁ pradīptām /
cikṣepa vegāt subhṛśaṁ mahātmā; madrādhipāya pravaraḥ kurūṇām //
[…]
tāṁ sarvaśaktyā prahitāṁ sa śaktiṁ; yudhiṣṭhireṇāprativāryavīryām /
pratigrahāyābhinanarda śalyaḥ; samyag ghutām agnir ivājyadhārām //
sā tasya marmāṇi vidārya śubhram; uro viśālaṁ ca tathaiva varma /
viveśa gāṁ toyam ivāprasaktā; yaśo viśālaṁ nṛpater dahantī //
nāsākṣikarṇāsyaviniḥsṛtena; prasyandatā ca vraṇasaṁbhavena /
saṁsiktagātro rudhireṇa so 'bhūt; krauñco yathā skandahato mahādriḥ //
prasārya bāhū sa rathād gato gāṁ; saṁchinnavarmā kurunandanena /
mahendravāhapratimo mahātmā; vajrāhataṁ śṛṅgam ivācalasya // (MBh 9,16.40, 48–51 [the fall of Śalya)

40. I wówczas włócznię ['] z jasnym, mocnym drzewcem,
    zdobną w klejnoty ['] i koral, błyszczącą,
    cisnął z impetem, mocno wielki duchem
    w przywódcę Madrów najwspanialszy z Kurów.
    […]
48. Śalja tę włócznię potężnie rzuconą
    przez Judhiszthirę z niewstrzymaną siłą
    chcąc chwycić i odrzucić głośno syknął,
    jak ogień masło ofiarne przyjmując.
49. Ta przebijając pancerz jego lśniący,
    jego wnętrzności oraz pierś szeroką,
    przeszyła ziemię gładko jakby wodę,
    niszcząc potężną chwałę pana ludów.

50. Krwią zlane było całe jego ciało,
    cieknącą z nosa, oczu, ust i uszu,
    z ran się sączącą, jakby wielka góra
    Krauńća przez Skandę była poraniona.
51. Ręce rozłożył, z wozu padł na ziemię,
    pancerz rozcięty miał przez chlubę Kurów,
    ów wielki duchem jak wielki słoń Indry,
    był jak szczyt góry rozcięty piorunem.

Relatively few short passages in Book 9 of the *Mahābhārata* were composed in the *jagatī* metre, a verse form of Vedic origin that ranks third in frequency in the *Ṛgveda*. This metre consists of 48 syllables, divided into four *pādas* of 12 syllables each. The general structure of a single *pāda* follows this pattern (Kiparsky 2018: 91–92):

⏓ – ⏓ – / ⏓ ⏑ ⏑ – / ⏑ – ⏑ ⏓ / (x 4)[27]

As I sought to render the twelve-syllable Sanskrit metre into Polish twelve-syllable verse, I once again discovered a suitable rhythmic pattern in Polish children's poetry.

Entliczek-pętliczek, czerwony stoliczek,
A na tym stoliczku pleciony koszyczek,
W koszyczku jabłuszko, w jabłuszku robaczek,
A na tym robaczku zielony kubraczek. [...][28]

An even more effective distribution of accents—and thus a superior source of metrical inspiration—can be found in the twelve-syllable metre employed by Julian Tuwim in the final section of his well-known poem 'Lokomotywa' ['Locomotive', 'Train engine'], a staple of Polish children's literature. While the poem's initial and middle sections are composed in a ten-syllable metre, the twelve-syllable verse is used to depict the train first accelerating and then reaching full speed. Occasionally, an eleven-syllable variant appears, where a pause replaces either the first or last of the twelve syllables. The metrical scheme of this part of the poem follows a structure based on four dactyls, with the final one catalectic. This results in a four-foot dactylic catalectic verse ('czterostopowiec daktyliczny katalektyczny' in Polish), preceded by an additional unstressed syllable that functions as a pre-tact:

(— —́ — — —́ — — —́ — — —́ —)
(s S s s S s s S s s S s).

27 Arnold (1905: 13) divides the three 'members' of one *jagatī* pāda as follows:
/ x – x – / x ᴗ ᴗ / – ᴗ – ᴗ x
x – stands for either short or long syllable.

28 Jan Brzechwa, 'Entliczek-pentliczek'. https://wolnelektury.pl/.

The second, fifth, eighth and eleventh syllables are stressed (accented).

> […] Najpierw powoli jak żółw ociężale, (11 syllables)
> Ruszyła maszyna po szynach ospale, (12 syllables)
> Szarpnęła wagony i ciągnie z mozołem,
> I kręci się, kręci się koło za kołem,
> I biegu przyspiesza, i gna coraz prędzej,
> I dudni, i stuka, łomoce i pędzi,
> […]
> Tak to to, tak to to, tak to to, tak to to! …[29]

The twelve-syllable metre was also used in the composition of the beautiful Polish poem ‘Deszcz jesienny’ [‘Autumn Rain’] by Leopold Staff (1878–1957). This poem maintains a consistent accentual pattern, with stresses falling on the second, fifth, eighth, and eleventh syllables.

> O szyby deszcz dzwoni, deszcz dzwoni jesienny,
> I pluszcze jednaki, miarowy, niezmienny,
> Dżdżu krople padają i tłuką w me okno…
> Jęk szklany… płacz szklany… a szyby w mgle mokną
> I światła szarego blask sączy się senny…
> O szyby deszcz dzwoni, deszcz dzwoni jesienny… […][30]

The metrical structure of the aforementioned poem is more accurately interpreted as being based on a trisyllabic metrical foot known as the amphibrach (Gr. *amphíbrachys*, Lat. *amphibrachus*, literally ‘short on both sides’; ˘ ¯ ˘). In classical Greek and Latin metrics, this foot originally consisted of a long syllable between two short ones, whereas in Polish, it comprises a stressed syllable positioned between two unstressed syllables (– –́ – / sSs). Each line of the poem, therefore, consists of four successive amphibrachs, forming what is known as an amphibrachic verse or a four-foot amphibrachic metre (Pol. ‘wiersz amfibrachiczny’ or ‘czterostopowiec amfibrachiczny’).[31]

---

29 Julian Tuwim, ‘Lokomotywa’. https://wolnelektury.pl/.

30 Leopold Staff, ‘Deszcz jesienny’, vv. 1–6. https://wolnelektury.pl/.

31 Cf. also
Puch czarny, puch miękki pod głowę podłóżmy,
Śpiewajmy, a cicho – nie trwóżmy, nie trwóżmy. […] (Adam Mickiewicz, ‘Kołysanka duchów nocnych’ [‘Lullaby of the Night Spirits’]. In *Dziady*, *Część III*, vv. 94–95. https://wolnelektury.pl/.
Po morzach wędrował, był kiedyś Farysem,
Pod palmą spoczywał, pod ciemnym cyprysem,
Z modlitwą Araba był w gmachach Khaaba, […] (Juliusz Słowacki, ‘Duma o Wacławie Rzewuskim’ [‘A Ballad about Wacław Rzewuski’], vv. 1–3. https://wolnelektury.pl/.

In Book 9 of the *Mahābhārata*, eight stanzas composed in the twelve-syllable *jagatī* metre conclude Chapter 56 (MBh 9,56.60–67).[32] This passage occurs in the midst of the depiction of the intense club duel between two formidable warriors and adversaries, Bhīma and Duryodhana. The narrative at this point approaches the moment preceding Bhīma's act of unchivalrous and dishonorable conduct—striking his opponent below the belt and crushing his thighs—an event that is recounted in the following chapter (MBh 9,57).

Within the twelve-syllable stanzas concluding Chapter 56 (MBh 9,56.60–67), Bhīma initially strikes Duryodhana with his club, causing him to collapse. However, after a brief interval, Duryodhana regains his composure, rises, and retaliates, inflicting injuries upon Bhīma and shattering his armour. Bhīma then falls to the ground, eliciting terror among the Pāṇḍava warriors. Ultimately, Bhīma too rises once more, and both warriors stand poised for the decisive confrontation.

tato gadāṁ vīrahaṇīm ayasmayīṁ; pragṛhya vajrāśanitulyanisvanām /
atāḍayac chatrum amitrakarśano; balena vikramya dhanaṁjayāgrajaḥ //
sa bhīmasenābhihatas tavātmajaḥ; papāta saṁkampitadehabandhanaḥ /
supuṣpito mārutavegatāḍito; mahāvane sāla ivāvaghūrṇitaḥ //
tataḥ praṇedur jahṛṣuś ca pāṇḍavāḥ; samīkṣya putraṁ patitaṁ kṣitau tava /
tataḥ sutas te pratilabhya cetanāṁ; samutpapāta dvirado yathā hradāt //
sa pārthivo nityam amarṣitas tadā; mahārathaḥ śikṣitavat paribhraman /
atāḍayat pāṇḍavam agrataḥ sthitaṁ; sa vihvalāṅgo jagatīm upāspṛśat //
sa siṁhanādān vinanāda kauravo; nipātya bhūmau yudhi bhīmam ojasā /
bibheda caivāśanitulyatejasā; gadānipātena śarīrarakṣaṇam //
tato 'ntarikṣe ninado mahān abhūd; divaukasām apsarasāṁ ca neduṣām /
papāta coccair amarapraveritaṁ; vicitrapuṣpotkaravarṣam uttamam //
tataḥ parān āviśad uttamaṁ bhayaṁ; samīkṣya bhūmau patitaṁ narottamam /
ahīyamānaṁ ca balena kauravaṁ; niśamya bhedaṁ ca dṛḍhasya varmaṇaḥ //
tato muhūrtād upalabhya cetanāṁ; pramṛjya vaktraṁ rudhirārdram ātmanaḥ /
dhṛtiṁ samālambya vivṛttalocano; balena saṁstabhya vṛkodaraḥ sthitaḥ // (MBh 9,56.60–67)

60. A wtedy brat starszy Zdobywcy Bogactwa,
kat wrogów, pochwycił maczugę żelazną,
morderczą dla wojów i grzmiącą jak piorun,
i nią swego wroga zuchwale uderzył.

[32] In the central section of Book 9, translated by Babkiewicz (MBh 9.33–53), individual stanzas composed in the twelve-syllable *jagatī* metre also appear, serving to introduce and conclude selected descriptive passages (see MBh 9.52.1–2, 20–21; 9.53.34–35; 9.40.35). These passages occur within a broader account dedicated to numerous sacred pilgrimage sites (*tīrthas*), which Balarāma, the elder brother of Kṛṣṇa, is said to have visited. The translator rendered these sections into Polish using a twelve-syllable metre, employing various rhythmic strategies to adapt the translated passages.

61. Twój syn uderzony tak przez Bhimasenę
przewrócił się, mięśnie na ciele mu drżały
jak gdyby był śalą z pięknymi kwiatami
trzęsącym się w lesie, gdy wiatr mocno wieje.
62. Krzyczeli, cieszyli się Pandu synowie
spostrzegłszy, że syn twój upada na ziemię,
lecz on już niebawem odzyskał świadomość
i powstał jak gdyby słoń powstał z jeziora.
63. Pan ziemi, któremu nieznany jest spokój,
waleczny rydwannik, wspaniale kroczący
uderzył Pandawę, gdy stanął tuż przed nim,
i ciężko go ranił, aż padł ów na ziemię.
64. I wydał Kaurawa jak lew ryk donośny,
gdy Bhimę swą siłą powalił na ziemię,
a gdy upadała maczuga tak lśniąca
jak piorun, roztrzaskał mu zbroję ochronną.
65. I z niebios donośne słyszano wołania
krzyczących apsaras i istot niebiańskich,
a z góry opadał zsyłany przez bogów
cudowny, rzęsisty deszcz kwiatów przeróżnych.
66. A wówczas twych wrogów strach wielki ogarnął,
gdy Bhimę widzieli, jak upadł na ziemię,
Kaurawę wśród mężów najpotężniejszego,
choć w zbroi masywnej rozciętej od ciosu.
67. Lecz zaraz, po chwili odzyskał świadomość,
oczyścił swą twarz całą we krwi skąpaną,
znów pełen dziarskości rozszerzył swe oczy,
wróciła odwaga i trwał Wilczobrzuchy.

7 Conclusion

In this article, I have presented several reflections on the rhythmic inspirations that emerged during my translation of extensive passages from the so-called Kurukṣetra books of the *Mahābhārata*. A direct reproduction of Sanskrit metre—which is based on syllabic quantity—is, of course, impossible in Polish, a language governed by dynamic stress. Instead, a translational strategy grounded in rhythmic equivalents has been proposed. The selection of Polish metres (such as the trochaic octosyllable, the three-footed dactylic catalectic verse, the eleven-syllable line with a caesura after the fifth syllable, the four-footed dactylic catalectic, or the four-footed amphibrachic metre) does not precisely correspond to the Sanskrit forms (*śloka*, *triṣṭubh*, *jagatī*). Nevertheless, it appears to allow for a reconstruction of their rhythmic effect within the framework of Polish poetics. My approach was thus based on a search for rhythmic equivalents within the Polish poetic tradition—among eight-, eleven-, and twelve-syllable lines.

In my translation process, I sought to embed the *Mahābhārata* passages within the Polish literary tradition of rhythmic verses (*tout proportions gardées*). In my search for rhythmic sources of inspiration, I frequently—often intuitively—drew upon the Polish poetic tradition, particularly the poetry of Polish Romanticism. This literary period is highly recognised both within the broader literary canon and the Polish educational system, where a substantial portion of its works has been incorporated into the mandatory reading curriculum for high school students.

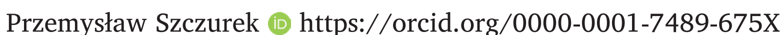
However, an equally significant source of metrical inspiration came from Polish children's poetry composed by poets of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries—works that were widely familiar to my generation. Many of these poems have not only held a special place in cultural memory for many decades but also exhibit considerable poetic merit.

The final part of the conclusion—of a text that is, above all, a personal record of a translator's journey—the one delivered half in jest, half in earnest—seems almost self-evident, no matter how trivial or banal it may appear. There is a well-known saying that money is lying in the street—one simply has to bend down to pick it up. By analogy, one might modify this adage: eight-syllable, eleven-syllable, and even twelve-syllable verses are all around us, embedded in Polish children's poetry as well as in rhythmic and rhyming literature intended for slightly older audiences. Thus, one potential approach to rendering the great Sanskrit epic metrically and rhythmically—particularly when you are neither a poet nor a professional translator—is to revisit childhood memories, perhaps even asking your parents and grandparents for research consultations (in case of the latter it is, unfortunately, a relevant approach for younger generations of researchers and translators). Additionally, it may require a reconciliation with certain school readings that perhaps were once perceived as burdensome. Ultimately, the appropriate metre and rhythm may be found within these recollections, discussions, and renewed engagements with the masterpieces of Polish literature—and perhaps, in the end, within ourselves.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID


Przemysław Szczurek https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7489-675X

References

Antologia literatury sanskryckiej. Accessed 8 October 2025. http://www.indika.pl.

Arnold, Edward Vernon. 1905. *Vedic Metre in Its Historical Development.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bhagavadgītā. Analiza gramatyczna i syntaktyczna, tłumaczenia, komentarze. Accessed 8 October 2025. http://www.bhagavadgita.eu.

Borowski, Gabriel. 2022. ‘Pojęcie przekładu w Indiach. Zarys problematyki’ [‘The Concept of Translation in India: An Overview’]. *Między oryginałem a przekładem* [*Between the Original and the Translation*] 28 (4)/58: 183–194.

Brzechwa, Jan. 2022. *Brzechwa dzieciom* [*Brzechwa for Children*]. Illustrated by Jan Marcin Szancer. Poznań: G&P Oficyna Wydawnicza (1st ed. 1961).

Byrski, Maria Krzysztof, trans., introd., and annot. 1985. *Manusmryti czyli traktat o zacności. Kamasutra czyli traktat o miłowaniu [Manusmṛti, or the Treatise on Virtue. Kāmasūtra, or the Treatise on Love]*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.

Czekalska, Renata, and Halina Marlewicz. 2005. ‘Przekład jako łącznik międzykulturowy’ [‘Translation as an Intercultural Bridge’]. In *Języki orientalne w przekładzie* [*Oriental Languages in Translation*], vol. 2, edited by Barbara Podolak, Andrzej Zaborski, and Grzegorz Zając, 223–251. Kraków: Polska Akademia Nauk.

DCS – Digital Corpus of Sanskrit. Accessed 8 October 2025. http://www.sanskrit-linguistics.org/dcs/.

Gawroński, Andrzej, trans. 1926. *Aświaghosza. Wybrane pieśni epiczne* [*Aśvaghoṣa. Selected Epic Songs*]. Lwów, Warszawa, and Kraków: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.

Heszen, Agnieszka. 2024. ‘Transpozycja metryki antycznej w przekładach na język polski – próba klasyfikacji’ [‘The Transposition of Ancient Metres in Polish Translations: An Attempt at Classification’]. *Między oryginałem a przekładem* [*Between the Original and the Translation*] 30 (4)/66: 11–29.

Kiparsky, Paul. 2018. ‘Indo-European Origins of the Greek Hexameter’. In *Language and Meter*, edited by Olav Hackstein and David Gunkel, 77–128. Leiden: Brill.

Konopnicka, Maria. 2018. *Wiersze dla dzieci* [*Poems for Children*]. Warszawa: Liwona.

Lange, Antoni, trans. 1906. *Nal i Damajanti. Baśń staroindyjska z Ksiąg Mahā Bhāraty* [*Nala and Damayantī: An Ancient Indian Tale from the Books of the Mahābhārata*]. Warszawa: G. Centnerszwer i Spółka.

Marlewicz, Halina. 2002. ‘Kilka uwag o przekładach z sanskrytu’ [‘Some Remarks on the Translation of Sanskrit Texts’]. In *Języki orientalne w przekładzie* [*Oriental Languages in Translation*], edited by Anna Krasnowolska, Barbara Mękarska, and Andrzej Zaborski, 269–277. Kraków: Polska Akademia Nauk.

Mejor, Marek, ed. 2007. *Światło słowem zwane. Wypisy z literatury staroindyjskiej* [*The Light Called Word: Excerpts from Ancient Indian Literature*]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie Dialog.

Michalski, Franciszek, trans. and comm. 1972. *Hymny Rigwedy* [*Hymns of the Ṛgveda*]. Wrocław: Ossolineum.

Pigoniowa, Mariola. 2021. ‘Opis Himalaji w pieśni pierwszej *Narodzin Kumary* Kalidasy (wraz z przekładem i komentarzem całej pieśni)’ [‘The Description of the Himalayas in Canto I of Kālidāsa’s *Kumārasambhava*: With Translation and Commentary on the Entire Canto’]. *Orbis Linguarum* 55: 19–49.

Rucińska, Anna, trans. and comm. 2002. *Bhagawadgita: Święta Pieśń Pana w myśl komentarza czcigodnego Madhusudany Saraswatiego odczytana* [*Bhagavadgītā: The Sacred Song of the Lord Interpreted According to the Commentary of the Venerable Madhusūdana Sarasvatī*]. Warszawa: Medium & Sawitar.

Rucińska, Anna, trans. 2014. *Walmiki. Ramajana. Księga dzieciństwa* [*Valmiki. The Ramāyāṇa: The book of childchood*]. Warszawa: Fundacja Vivaswan.

Sachse, Joanna, trans., introd., and comm. 2020. *Bhagawadgita czyli Pieśń Czcigodnego* [*Bhagavadgītā, that is, the Song of the Venerable One*]. Wrocław: Instytut Studiów Klasycznych, Śródziemnomorskich i Orientalnych, Uniwersytet Wrocławski.

Schayer, Stanisław. 1936. *Literatura Indyjska* [*Indian Literature*]. Warszawa: Trzaska, Evert, Michalski.

Sellmer, Sven. 2015. *Formulaic Diction and Versification in the Mahābhārata.* Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM.

Szuwalska, Iwona, trans. 2005. *Bhagawadgita.* Warszawa: Quo Vadis Vision.

Tuwim, Julian. 2024. *Wiersze dla dzieci* [*Poems for Children*]. Illustrated by Olga Siemaszko. Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka (1st ed. 1954).

Urbańska, Hanna. 2016. *Pańczatantra w bajce polskiej* [*Pañcatantra in Polish Fable*]. Wrocław: Chronicon.

van Buitenen, J.A.B., trans., introd., and annot. 1973. *The Mahābhārata. Vol. 1: The Book of the Beginning*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Wolne Lektury. Accessed 8 October 2025. https://www.wolnelektury.pl/.

FOLIA ORIENTALIA—BIBLIOTHECA 2 (2025)
DOI 10.24425/for.2025.156880

Rajendran Chettiarthodi
University of Calicut, India | crajenin@yahoo.com

Translation as a 'Superhuman' Feat: A Metrical *Mahābhārata* in Malayalam

Abstract Koṭuṅṅallūr Kuññikkuṭṭan Tampurān (1864–1913) completed a verse translation of the *Mahābhārata* in just 874 days, reproducing the exact metres of the original text. This unique work is superior in literary merit to the earlier fourteenth- and fifteenth-century attempts to translate the *Mahābhārata* within Kerala's musical song tradition known as *pāṭṭu*. Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, when scholarly translations rather than free adaptations had become the norm, the author sought to produce an accurate mirror image of the original Sanskrit text in Malayalam, rather than a loose retelling in verse. Unlike Tuñcatt Eḻuttacchan, who employed a lucid *maṇipravāḷa* hybrid tilted towards Malayalam and enriched with Sanskrit vocabulary, Tampurān used a more colloquial form of Malayalam, which made his expression lively and accessible to common readers. The work also differs from the monumental English rendering by K.M. Ganguli (*The Mahābhārata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa*), which does not preserve the metrical structure of the original. Even more remarkable is the fact that Tampurān's translation was produced extempore, shedding light on the literary culture that prevailed in nineteenth-century Kerala. This paper investigates both the cultural and aesthetic significance of this extraordinary translation project.

Keywords *Mahābhārata*, translation, Malayalam, Kuññikkuṭṭan Tampurān, metre, literary culture

1 Introduction

The present paper focuses on the cultural and aesthetic aspects of a remarkable translation of the *Mahābhārata*, the great epic of India from the original Sanskrit into Malayalam, a regional language of South India. It was composed by a versatile poet, the legendary Kuññikkuṭṭan Tampurān (1864–1913) (hereafter called Tampurān) who belonged to the royal family of Koṭuṅṅallūr in central Kerala. The author got an iconic stature in Kerala thanks to this work which many people consider as a super human feat.

The fact that it took just 874 days for him to complete this elegant verse translation is itself amazing. It may be recalled that the *Mahābhārata,* which consists of more than one hundred thousand verses is in length about eight times as the '*Iliad* and *Odyssey* put together' (Macdonell 1990: 237) and by far the greatest epic poem humanity has ever produced and normally, it should take several years for a person to

© 2025 The Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

complete the task of translating such a huge work. The speed with which he accomplished this is a feat unparalleled in any language and defies notions of translation as a slow and deliberate process, in which the translator has to struggle negotiating two different languages often using the trial and error method. To compound the matter, Tampurān had decided to render the text into verse form. All this he executed in an amazing manner, devoting a portion of his time every day, without compromising his routine jobs and even frequent travel.

The translation is done in a very lucid style and has made it possible for readers who have no access to the original text to experience the tone and tenor of the original text in their own language. The translation departs from other renderings in Malayalam and other languages in that the author, apart from giving shape to a work of high literary quality, consistently used the exact metres of the original text. It is no wonder that the translation has become a classic in Malayalam superseding other renderings of the epic. Understandably, almost a superhuman aura has been associated with the personality of the author due to this work.

2 The background

It needs to be asserted, though, that Tampurān was more than equal to his task. He was a prodigy who seems to have shown his amazing skill to compose poetry instantly even from his early childhood. Called *drutakavanam* in Malayalam, this type of feat has been compared to the concept of 'lisping in numbers' by a literary historian remembering Alexander Pope, who famously said 'I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came' (Leelavathy 2002: 135).

There are numerous literary anecdotes narrated by his biographers who highlight his quick-wittedness and gift to compose verses extempore (Ramavarma 1992: 30). He continued this practice throughout his life and used verse as a vehicle of expression in even conversations and letter writing. Literary historians locate him in what is described as *Koṭuṅṅallūrkalari*, a centre of learning which flourished in the royal palace of Koṭuṅṅallūr of central Kerala, around nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The galaxy of poets who flourished here came to be known under the rubrics of *Veṇmaṇi prasthānam*, a literary movement initiated by Veṇmaṇi Achan Nampūtiri, who was the father of the translator himself and a poet of no mean order. This movement was a continuation of the old *maṇipravāḷa* (mixture of pearl and coral metaphorically signifying the admixture of Malayalam and Sanskrit) tradition of Sanskrit-Malayalam hybrid literature characterised by Sanskrit meters and alliteration.[1] Instant compositions became something like a norm celebrated by these talented poets. But in contradistinction to the heavily sanskritised *maṇipravāḷa* tradition of

[1] As a consequence of Sanskritisation, a distinct stream of literature called *maṇipravāla* emerged which was a harmonious blend of Sanskrit and the local language as distinct from the old *pāṭṭu* stream which employed only Tamil phonemes and which employed alliterative devices of *monai* (repetition of the first syllable in both hemistiches) and *etukai* (repetition of the second syllable in all the quatrains) and *antādi* (beginning of the next verse with the last word of the previous verse).

the past, the poets of *Veṇmaṇi* school preferred a colloquial and lucid style with the preponderance of Malayalam.

Tampurān showed his proficiency in translation when quite young in age. Just as he composed verses extempore, he found pleasure in accepting the challenges of friends to compose translation of Sanskrit verses instantaneously. Apart from the translation of the *Mahābhārata*, his works include the Malayalam rendering of *Bhāgavata* (up to the fourth Skandha), *Hariścandropākhyāna*, (1928) V*ikramorvaśīya*, *Śukasandeśa*, *Kokilasandeśa*, *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi*, *Candrikāvīthī*, *Śankarācāryacarita*, *Lakṣmīsahāya* and *Kādambarīkathāsāra.* Interestingly, though he did not know much the English language, with the help of some friends proficient in English, he studied Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *Othello* and translated them into Malayalam.

3 *Mahābhārata*: earlier adaptations

Mahābhārata has exercised irresistible charm over the minds of the people of Kerala as is vouchsafed by the innumerable retellings of the work. It has a long history of oral and written transmission, adaptation, retelling and dramatization. It has been a sourcebook for many a representation in classical and folk traditions. The influence of *Mahābhārata* in Kerala can be seen both in literature written here in both Sanskrit and Malayalam.

The Malayalam interface with *Mahābhārata* was heralded by *Bhāṣābhagavadgītā*, *Kaṇṇaśśabhārata* and *Bhāratamāla* written by poets of a group collectively known as Niraṇam poets of the fourteenth and fifteenth century. Among the Niraṇam poets, it was Mādhava Paṇikkar who has the credit for translating the *Bhagavadgītā* for the first time anywhere in the world (Leelavathy 2002: 57). He has condensed the seven hundred verses of the *Bhagavadgītā* into 320 songs. Śaṅkara, another Niraṇam poet condensed the entire *Mahābhārata* into 1363 verses in his *Bhāratamālā*. Rāma, yet another author belonging to the Niraṇam group wrote *Kannaśśabhārata*, along with other devotional works like the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Bhāgavata* and *Śivarātrimāhātmya.* These three adaptations in *pāṭṭu* tradition of Malayalam literature represent a quantum leap in the language in that they profusely use Sanskrit words without any inhibition, a trait which is absent in earlier *pāṭṭu* works like the *Rāmacarita* (Krishna Pillai 1958: 110).They are composed in a musical meter later called *Tarangiṇī* which has four lines having two halves having sixteen prosodial syllabic measures (*mātrās*). They are characterised by devotional fervour and aim at securing cessation of sins through the retelling of divine stories for the composers and securing final emancipation for the reader (Krishna Pillai 1958: 113).

Another example of the epic retelling is the *Bhāratagāthā* of little literary value, ascribed, most probably baselessly, to the illustrious poet Ceruśśeri Nampūtiri. The devotional fervour seen in Niraṇam poets reaches its climax in the *Bhāṣābhārata*, authored by Tuñcatt Eḷuttachan who has made remarkable success in evoking the grandeur of the epic armed with an enchanting poetic style and the rhythmic cadence of indigenous metrical structure of Malayalam. Tuñcatt Eḷuttachan came to

be venerated as even the father of the Malayalam language based on his epic translation projects, especially on his *Adhyatmarāmāyaṇa* which became immensely popular all over Kerala. However, many critics reckon his *Bhāṣābhārata* as somewhat superior in literary qualities in comparison with the former though it somehow missed the same popularity.

4 The paradigmatic shift in the history of the translation

These earlier attempts of fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to translate the *Mahābhārata* were in the musical song tradition of Kerala, called *pāṭṭu*. The translation work undertaken by Tampurān departs from them on several counts. Firstly, the author was writing in the beginning of the twentieth century where scholarly translations rather than free adaptations became the norm. Unlike in the case of earlier works triggered off by a devotional zeal, his ideal was something like an intellectual conquest aimed at making an accurate and faithful mirror image of the original in Malayalam language. Continuing with the earlier tradition of rendering *Mahābhārata* in loose songs of flexible structure was definitely ruled out in such an exciting challenge. It is true that like his predecessors, he also definitely venerated the text as a sacred scripture. But while his predecessors saw the epics as the stories for the glorification of their favourite deities, his quest was of more of a linguistic nature rather than of a religious one. It was because of his insistence on the faithful rendering of the original that he was not satisfied with anything short of retaining the original Sanskrit meters used in the epic. This was indeed a paradigmatic shift in the history of the translation of the epic in Malayalam language. The poet was attempting something no other predecessor had dared to attempt. He aimed at making an exact replica of the epic in his mother tongue, retaining the textual and metrical structure of the original. He also did not interpolate any didactic or devotional portions based on his personal faith into the body of the epic. He did not want to tamper with the text by editing out or abridging any portion. He wanted to retain the original flavour of the epic as far as he could and miraculously succeeded in his almost impossible task.

5 Earlier attempts of the author

Tampurān's engagement with *Mahābhārata* has a long history. Earlier, in 1892 there was an attempt for 'team translation' of the epic involving about a dozen poets who were supposed to contribute the translation of their assigned portion. The translation was to be done using Dravidian meters following *Kilippāṭṭu* style in which Tuñcatt Eḷuttacchan had rendered *Mahābhārata*. The portions assigned to Kuññikkuṭṭan Tampurān were the *Āraṇyaparvan*, *Śalyaparvan* and *Śāntiparvan* excluding the *Mokṣadharma* portion. It is recorded by his biographer that Tampurān had completed his assignment, but due to the laziness of the other poets, the project could never be completed (Ramavarma 1992: 201).

Another attempt for team translation was initiated by Kaṭattanāṭṭ Udayavarman Tampurān. This project was to translate *Bhāratamañjarī* of Kṣemendra. This time, the assigned translation of *Droṇaparvan* completed by Kuññikkuṭṭan Tampurān was partly being serialised in a publication until the demise of Udayavarman Tampurān in 1907.

It was this engagement with the *Mahābhārata* which triggered off the desire in Tampurān to attempt a task hitherto not attempted by anybody: to translate the entire *Mahābhārata* into Malayalam using the same meters of the original. It is true that a similar project was already undertaken by K.M. Ganguli, whose mammoth *The Mahābhārata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa Translated into English Prose* was published between 1883 and 1896 (Ganguli 2017), but it was in English prose addressed to the urban English knowing elite of India. The translator did not have to retain the metrical structure of the original. The earlier Malayalam versions of the *Mahābhārata* already mentioned were abridgements mostly using Dravidian meters the loose structure which gave a lot of expressive freedom to the translator.

6 The task and its magnitude

Thus, the task undertook by Tampurān was daunting: he had to cover the entire *Mahābhārata* in his scheme and to see that the flavour of the original text including its metrical structure is not lost in the translation. An inflexional language like Sanskrit can condense expressions to an amazing degree, and usually, it is difficult for a language like Malayalam which has an agglutinating structure to keep pace with the narration in the original which is necessary for a translation using the same metre. The translator was also not certain about the time necessary to complete the task he was to undertake or whether he could complete it at all. He compared his state of mind to that of Hanumān, the character in *Rāmāyaṇa*, who was about to leap into the air to cross the ocean, mounting the mountain Mandara, in his search fo Sītā in Laṅkā. But he did take the plunge after seeking divine help visiting his temple (Ramavarma 1992: 204).

7 The process

It is interesting that an ‘epic’ aura surrounds accounts prevalent in Kerala about the method of Tampurān’s translation. Somebody would recite each verse aloud and on hearing it he would instantaneously recite its translation aloud. A scribe nearby would take it down. Since he was a frequent traveller, the venues and scribes also had to change accordingly. The generic name for the scribe was Gaṇapati, recollecting the story that it was Lord Gaṇapati, the elephant faced god, who wrote down the entire *Mahābhārata* when Vyāsa the author composed and recited the original text. Biographers have recorded that in one respect, the scribes of Kuññikkuṭṭan Tampurān were lagging behind Lord Gaṇapati. Such was the speed with which Gaṇapati wrote the recited text that Vyāsa found it difficult to keep pace with him. Therefore, he

insisted that Gaṇapati should write down the verses only after understanding their meaning. When even this stipulation did not work, Vyāsa started making his verses as obscure as possible to gain some breathing space. But in the case of Tampurān, it was the scribe who found it difficult to keep pace with the translator as verse after verse flowed from him spontaneously the moment it was recited (Ramavarma 1992: 207). All this was done in the morning every day. The scribe was supposed to prepare the fair copy and to get it corrected by the author in the evening. But this plan was never executed, since in the evening, Tampurān would be busy playing *Caturanga*, the Indian chess or be engaged in small talk with his friends. He did not like to be disturbed and would summarily dismiss the scribe with the remark that no scrutiny would be necessary. Initially, he decided to translate fifty verses every day after taking his daily ablutions and worship in the morning, between 7 am and 9 am. However, he had to increase the number of verses to 100 soon on realising the inadequacy of the daily quota.

The translation work was done in the Malayalam Era 1079 which is equivalent to CE 7 May 1904, and completed on 1082 Kanni12 which is equivalent to CE 28 September 1906.[2] Tampurān obviously had no opportunity to consult the critical edition of the text of BORI which appeared later, in 1927–1966. There is no mention of the source book in translation, and we have to infer that he was following the manuscript tradition of Kerala which is somewhat larger than the critical edition.

8 The translation: lucidity and perspicuity

The verses which spontaneously sprang from the face of the translator were lucid, simple and perspicuous so that one could grasp the meaning at the very instance of hearing. In metrical structure, syntax and vocabulary, the translation was as close to the original as possible. A few instances will suffice to drive the point.

> *klaibyam māsma gamaḥ pārtha naitad tvayyupapadyate*
> *kṣudram hṛdayadaurbalyam tyaktvottoṣṭha paramtapa* || (*Mahābhārata* 6.26.3 [*Bhagavadgītā* 2.3])

> *klībatvam elkolā pārtha ninakkokkillat oṭṭume*
> *tucchamiccittadaurbalyam viṭṭelkkuka parantapa*

Here, while the translator has retained *hṛdayadaurbalyam*, *pārtha* and *parantapa* and slightly modified *klaibyam* as *klībatvam*, all the other ideas are conveyed in conversational Malayalam, and the verse as a whole has retained the flavour of the target language.

2 These dates were recorded in what is called 'Kali chronogram' an algebraic method of representing numerals using letters. See for details Ramavarma (1992: 203–216).

sulabhāh puruṣāḥ rājan satatam priyavādinaḥ
apriyasya ca tathyasya vaktā śrotā ca durlabhaḥ | (*Mahābhārata* 2.87.16)

āḷereyuṇṭām rājāve nityam seva paṛaññiṭān
seva viṭṭu hitam colvon kelkkuvānum curukkamām

Here the translator has completely abandoned the vocabulary of the source language except the word *rājan*, and using colloquial expressions, hit the nail on its head to convey the gist of a proverbial statement.

yā niśa sarvabhūtānām tasyām jāgarti samyamī
yasmin jāgrati bhūtāni sā niśā paśyato muneḥ
evarkkum rātriyām neram uṇarnnīṭunnu samyamī
kāṇum munikku niśayaṅṅellārum uṇarunnatil

This is a verse cited by the poetician Ānandavardhana in his *Dhvanyāloka* to illustrate suggestive poetry using metaphorical expressions. The suggested sense that an ascetic is indifferent to the ways of the world is beautifully conveyed in the translation.

atikrāntasukhāḥ kālāḥ pratyupasthitadāruṇāḥ
śvaḥ śvaḥ pāpīyadivasāḥ pṛthivī gatayauvanā || (*Mahābhārata* 6 ||1.128.6)

This again is a verse cited by Ānandavardhana in his D*hvanyāloka* to illustrate suggestive poetry. The verse, put in the mouth of Sage Vyāsa contains a lot of metaphorical expressions and their beauty is not at all lost in the translation:

kaḷiññu saukhyam kālattin paḷakkam bahudāruṇam
nāle nāleppāpadinam ūḷikko kettu yauvanam || (*Mahābhārata* I.119.6)

All these verses are in Śloka meter, with four quarters of eight syllables each. Let us take another example using the slightly longer meter *Indiavajra*, which has four quarters with eleven syllables.

tarko'pratiṣṭho śrutayo vibhinnāḥ naiko munir yasya vacaḥ pramāṇam
dharmasya tatvam nihitam guhāyām mahājano yena gataḥ sa panthāḥ || (*Mahābhārata* [*Vanaparva*] 3. 313.11)

The translation of this verse has a story behind it. Kuññikkuṭṭan Tampurān was always open to suggestions for the improvement of the quality of his translation as is evident from the corrections he made in his translation of the verse. In the opinion of V.K. Ramamenon, the scribe, the translation done by Kuññikkuṭṭan Tampurān was not very elegant, and he pointed out that this verse was already translated by

Tampurān himself earlier in a better way. Hearing the comment, Tampurān abandoned the new version and consented to retain his own earlier translation which runs as follows:

> *tarkam nilakkum marayokke vere*
> *maharṣimārkkuḷḷa mataṅṅal vere*
> *guhakkakam veppitu dharmatatvam*
> *mahājanam pom vaḷi tanne mārgam*

9 The elegance of the translation: three factors

As indicated early, the amazing ease with which Tampurān could do such renderings can be attributed to three factors. One was his capacity for instant poetry for which he had won the title *sarasadrutakavikulakirīṭamaṇi*- the crest jewel of quick-witted extempore poets. The other factors were his deep erudition in the source language Sanskrit on one hand and the absolute mastery over Malayalam, the target language, on the other. It was unusual in Kerala that a scholar poet erudite in Sanskrit would meticulously eschew heavily sanskritised style and to prefer simple Malayalam language in his writings. The Kotuṅṅallūr Kalari to which he belonged always showed a partiality for simple Malayalam over the sanskritised one. Tampurān once had even gone to the extent of experimenting with a poetic style totally devoid of Sanskrit. Once he declared his preferred style thus:

> Our recourse is the language accepted by [Tuñcatt] Eḷuttacchan. This clever man [i.e. myself] will not utter a single word which is not agreeable to all people.[3]

This was written under the belief that linguistic style perfected by Tuñcatt Eḷuttacchan, the archetypal figure in Malayalam poetry was the language of the common people. Tampurān seems to have reached this conclusion based on the practice of common people daily reading the works of Tuñcatt Eḷuttacchan. Actually, Tuñcatt Eḷuttacchan used a lucid Maṇipravāḷa hybrid tilted towards Malayalam with profuse inputs from Sanskrit. However, a close perusal of Tampurān's work would indicate that he used a more colloquial and less formal form of Malayalam in his translation which makes his expression lively. In this, he did not have any inhibition that the epic grandeur of the style is to be maintained vigorously. Of course, it is true that his style has a fair share of simple Sanskrit in its vocabulary and rarely he had to use some obscure Sanskrit words. But these are exceptional cases. A frequent traveller who would mix freely with the local populace, he had thorough knowledge of the dialectical nuances of Malayalam. His uninhibited preference for the ordinary colloquial Malayalam is seen throughout in his translation of *Mahābhārata*. This makes the work easily accessible to ordinary people who do not have the tools to

3 Quoted by Ramavarma (1992: 113).

decode the original text. However, it may be due to what could be perceived as a flippant attitude that some literary highbrows made fun of the work which was drawing unprecedented approbation all over Kerala. It is on record that even his family members, the scholars of Koṭuṅṅallūr royal palace initially used to ridicule the translation as a ‘commoner’s pudding’ (*cettippāyasam*), probably alluding to its simplicity and unpretentious style. But soon the ridicule gave way to awe and respect (Ramavarma 1992: 212).

Another important stipulation Tampurān made in translation was never to give up the syntactical features of Malayalam. He once wrote: ‘In order to create elegance in the sentence, one should always adhere to a sentence style which is appropriate to Malayalam’ (Ramavarma 1992: 112). While this is largely true in his translation, Tampurān had to tackle the problem of declensional agreement in ordinary expressions frequently. While Malayalam does not have this agreement rule, Sanskrit follows the norm that the adjectives should have the same case, gender and number as that of the noun. Tampurān freely flouted the Malayalam rule and followed the Sanskrit syntax piling up adjectives in the same case as that of the qualified noun, treating them as individual nouns.

10 Reception

There was a huge reception waiting for the work when it was completed. It was decided to publish it in monthly instalments in some journal. The *Malayālamanorama*, a prominent Malayalam newspaper lauded the work as a work to be respected by all Malayalam speaking people and appealed people to extend all support for the venture. A.R. Rajarajavarma, creating a furore in literary circles, suggested that the work is far more superior to the *Bhāṣabharata* of Tuñcat Eḷuttacchan, which he described as ‘having no tail or corner’. When there was some protest against the comments on Eḷuttachan, widely venerated as the father of Malayalam, he clarified that he did not mean any disrespect to him; he was comparing the syntactical restrictions in Sanskrit meter followed by Tampurān to the flexible structure of Dravidian meters in Eḷuttacchan’s translation (Ramavarma 1992: 220). Kerala Varma Valiya Koyil Tampurān, the veteran figure in Malayalam literature described the attempt as ‘amazing’ and called him ‘Keralavyāsa’, the Vyāsa belonging to Kerala (Ramavarma 1992: 223).

Joseph Mundasseri, a famous critic has recorded that scholars from North India found the attempt of a single person to translate *Mahābhārata* in its entirety as amazing (Ramavarma 1992: 212). Many a Keralite liked to believe that behind such a feat, there was some divine hand; Tampurān had unshakeable faith the Goddess of the Kotuṅṅallūr shrine and he started his herculean task after making an offering to the deity. Literary historians like Ullur Paramesvara Iyer also shared such a belief and portrayed him as an avatar of god. Kuttikrishna Marar, a famous critic, citing the superhuman speed of the translation process, defended the idea that the feat of the translator is divine (Marar 1964: 32–37). However, rational critics like Kuttippuzha

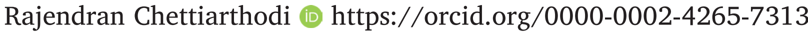
Krishna Pillai maintain that by making Tampurān a god, people are actually denying him greatness due to him as a human being.[4]

But all of the critics are unison in upholding the greatness of the amazing translation.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID


Rajendran Chettiarthodi https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4265-7313

References

Ganguli, Kisari Mohan. 2017. *The Complete Mahabharata.* Calcutta.

Krishna Pillai, N. 1958. *Kairaliyute Katha.* Kottayam: D.C. Books.

Kunhikuttan Thampuran, Kodungalloor. 1906. *Bhasha Bharatham.* Kottayam: D.C. Books.

Krishna Warrior, N.V. 1975. 'The Rāmāyaṇa in Malayalam Literature and Folk-Lore'. In *The Ramayana Tradition in Asia*, edited by V. Raghavan, 204–213. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.

Leelavathy, M. 2002. *Malayala Kavitha Sahithya Charithram.* Thrissur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi.

Mahābhārata = Sukthankar, Vishnu S. (1925–1943), S.K. Belvalkar (1943–1961), and P.L. Vaidya (1961–1966), eds. 1933–1966. *Mahābhārata*. 19 vols. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

Marar, Kuttikrishna. 1964. 'Kunhikkuttan Tampurānte Mahābhārata Vivartanam'. *Tilakam* 3 (7–8): 32–37.

Macdonell, Arthur A. 1990. *A History of Sanskrit Literature.* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Rajendran, Chettiarthodi. 2019. *Nilayute Kayyoppukal.* Thrissur: Green Books.

Ramavarma, K.T. 1992. *Mahakavi Kunjhi Kuttan Tampurān.* Thiruvananthapuram: Department of Cultural Publications, Government of Kerala.

Sankaran, K.P. 2009. 'Paribhasha enna Varadanam'. In *Kulirum Tanalum*, 204–215. Calicut: Mathrubhumi Books.

[4] Quoted by Ramavarma (1992: 3).

FOLIA ORIENTALIA—BIBLIOTHECA 2 (2025)
DOI 10.24425/for.2025.156881

Hermina Cielas Leão
Jagiellonian University, Poland | hermina.cielas@uj.edu.pl

David Pierdominici Leão
Jagiellonian University, Poland | david.pierdominici.leao@uj.edu.pl

From La Mancha to Kashmir: Notes on the Windmill Episode in the Sanskrit Version of *Don Quijote*

Abstract The present article aims at investigating selected passages from the Sanskrit version of Cervantes's *Don Quijote*. Published in 2019 as *Ḍān Kvikṣoṭaḥ*, the translation was completed in 1936 by two Kashmiri Pandits—Jagaddhar Zadoo and Nityanand Shastri—on the basis of an English rendering by Charles Jarvis published in 1742. The study of the windmill episode from the *Quijote* (I, 8) and the comparative analysis of the early modern Spanish original, the English medium, and the Sanskrit translation reveal how the practice of translating not from the original source may influence the meaning and enlighten the difficulties of rendering extraneous elements in a language such as Sanskrit, quite distant from morphological and phonetical points of view. In the course of the analysis special attention is paid to the rendering of proper names, modern concepts and objects, specific expressions and to the translation strategies employed by the Indian Pandits.

Keywords *Don Quijote*, *Ḍān Kvikṣoṭaḥ*, Cervantes, Sanskrit translation, Kashmiri Pandits, Modern Sanskrit Literature

1 Introduction

In 2006, Vibha Maurya, a former Professor of Spanish at the University of Delhi, published her translation of the first part of Cervantes's immortal novel, *Don Quijote* into Hindi; the task was completed with the addition of the second part in 2015, nearly 400 hundred years after the publication of the original work.[1] Maurya's effort is especially notable for one main reason: this Hindi translation represents the first complete Indian rendering of Cervantes's novel based on the early modern Spanish original text, without the medium of a translation in another language. This fact may seem surprising especially in the light of the long attested history of foreign translations of *Don Quijote*, starting basically after the printing of the first part in 1605.[2]

1 See Maurya (2006; 2015).

2 For more on the complex matter of *Don Quijote*'s translations in European and Indian languages, please refer to Dimitrov (2019: XI–XLI).

© 2025 The Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547–1616), the foremost exponent of the late Spanish Renaissance and of the so called *siglo de oro*, 'the Golden Age', is acknowledged to be one of the greatest giants in world literature.[3] Despite a prolific activity as a writer, in the frame of a rather turbulent life, his fame is especially bound to a single work: *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*, that seems to embody the apogee of his thought and literary achievement. The first part of the novel was published in 1605 in Madrid, followed by the second one titled *Segunda parte del ingenioso caballero don Quijote de la Mancha* in 1615. The novel became quickly recognised and popular, as it is clear from the very early translations into English (1612–1620), French (1614–1618) and Italian (1622–1625), followed by a partial German rendering in 1648 (Dimitrov 2019: XII–XIII).

The enormous success and popularity of Cervantes's novel and the great number of circulating translations made in the 17th–18th centuries gave rise to a new bibliographical fashion. The bibliophiles from around the world started to collect copies of editions and translations for their private libraries. Some of them went even to the extreme of commissioning new renderings to enrich their collections.

From an Indological point of view, one of the most interesting cases is the one of the magnate Carl Tilden Keller (1872–1955), a Harvard-trained accountant in Boston whose fairly established social position allowed him to devote his resources to book collecting.[4] Keller's obsession with *Don Quijote* is attested by the fact that, by August 1936, his personal collection amounted to 500 editions, while only four years later it reached more than 700 exemplars. His efforts were mainly directed at acquiring translations of Cervantes's masterpiece in all possible languages; to reach this goal, Keller frequently commissioned translations to be made by scholars and specialists. One of the intermediaries recursed to by the American collector was Sir Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943), a British archaeologist, explorer and philologist of Hungarian origin trained at Oxford. After a first meeting in London in 1924, and a closer acquaintance during Stein's sojourn at Harvard in 1929–1930, the two gentlemen initiated a collaboration with mutual gain: Keller secured financial resources for Stein's travels and expeditions in exchange for helping him to obtain new editions and translations of *Don Quijote*. Taking advantage of Stein's Sanskrit education and connections in India, the magnate inquired about the possibility of obtaining translations of Cervantes's novel into Indian languages and commissioning new ones. By the 1930s, the presence of Indian translations of the *Quijote* was already attested, the first being a Gujarati version published in monthly issues in 1885 and in book format in 1886–1888. However, these renderings were not conducted from the original early modern Spanish text, but through the medium of an English translation or another

[3] The account of Cervantes's biography is beyond the scope of the present article. An interested reader may refer to one of many works devoted to the topic, for instance Byron (1978) and McCrory (2002). For an overview of the life and writings of Cervantes, see Cascardi (2002).

[4] The following description of Keller's relation with Stein and the circumstances of commissioning the Sanskrit rendering of *Don Quijote* is based on Dimitrov (2019: XLIX–LXXIII).

Indian translation made from English one, often in an abridged version. As already noted, this state of matters prevailed until the early 21st century.

As evident from the extent of Keller's and Stein's correspondence, the bibliophile sought to obtain new translations of Cervantes's novel into different Asian languages, such as Tibetan, Manchu and Mongolian; similar efforts were of course directed towards the languages of India. The earliest reference to a possible commission to translate *Don Quijote* into Sanskrit and Kashmiri seems to appear in a letter dated to April 6, 1935. After considering possible options for this task, Aurel Stein decided to contact one of his old associates, Pandit Nityanand Shastri (1874–1942).[5] The Pandit agreed to undertake the project but, eventually, due to a paralysis resulting from an ischemic attack, sought for the assistance of Jagaddhar Zadoo (1890–1981). The scholars agreed to prepare partial translations of *Don Quijote* into Sanskrit and Kashmiri according to the wish of Keller, who provided them with a copy of an English translation and the chapters to be rendered marked by Stein.[6]

Although the correspondence between the parties involved in the endeavour does not specify a copy of which English translation was provided to the Pandits, Dragomir Dimitrov and other Marburg Indologists who prepared the critical edition of the text and published it in 2019 established that the Sanskrit rendering must have been based on the translation by Charles Jervas (c. 1675–1739) (Dimitrov 2019: XCV). Better known as Charles Jarvis due to a printing mistake, the translator was an Irish painter, art collector, and self-taught Hispanist, whose rendering of the *Quijote* was published posthumously in 1742 and gained popularity throughout the 18th–19th centuries.[7] Nityanand Shastri and Jagaddhar Zadoo completed the Sanskrit translation in August 1936 and the calligraphic copy of it reached Boston in April 1937. The manuscript adorned Keller's collection and, after his death in 1955, it was transferred to the Harvard library, where it was rediscovered in 2011 by Stanislav Jager from Marburg.

After this brief introduction that brings closer the circumstances of commissioning and publishing the only Sanskrit rendering of *Don Quijote*, our attention will focus on the text of translation and its relation to the Cervantes's original and the Jarvis's English version provided to Nityanand Shastri and Jagaddhar Zadoo by Keller and Stein.

2 The translations in comparison: proper names

The comparison between the early modern Spanish original, Jarvis's translation and the Sanskrit rendering reveal how the practice of translating not from the original source may influence the meaning and enlighten the difficulties of rendering extraneous elements in a language so distant from the Spanish.

---

5 For more on the relation between Aurel Stein and the Kashmiri Pandits also see Pandita (2001).

6 For more details concerning the Sanskrit and Kashmiri translations of selected parts of *Don Quijote* also consult Pandita (2002: 269–287).

7 For more about Charles Jarvis and his translation of *Don Quijote*, please consult for example Pegum (2009).

First of all, interesting observations can be made analysing the Sanskrit rendering of the proper names of the main characters and of others, occasionally mentioned in the course of the narrative:[8]

Cervantes	Jarvis	Nityanand Shastri and Zadoo
Don Quijote	Don Quixote	*Ḍān Kvikṣoṭa*
Sancho Panza	Sancho Panza	*Sāṃcopāṃja*
Rocinante	Rosinante	*Rojinaṇṭa*
Dulcinea	Dulcinea	*Dolasenā*
Briareo	Briareus	*Brairasa*
Frestón	Friston	*Phrisṭana*

The changes of the names proposed by Jarvis mirror to a smaller or larger extent the pronunciation of given names in Cervantes's original. The only exception is the name of the giant Briareus, rendered by Jarvis in its Latin form. An interesting case is the one of the names of Rocinante and Dulcinea: the form in which the former is rendered seems to suggest a phonetic adaptation of the original, while the latter is left unchanged, despite the occurrence of the very same phonetic sequence as in Rocinante, namely *ci*. Noteworthy is also the adaptation in the Sanskrit translation: of course, because of the significant differences of the Sanskrit phonetic system, the authors had to modify the names as in certain cases a direct phonetic rendition was not actually possible. Even though a more accurate rendering into Sanskrit from the original would not have been difficult or problematic, the Pandits' decision is understandable, considering that they did not have a direct access to the middle Spanish text.

Another matter is the meaning of the names: Cervantes named some of his characters with a precise intent that becomes lost in translation. For instance, the name Sancho Panza contains a clear comical reference to the character's appearance, as in Spanish *panza* colloquially denotes 'belly'. Dulcinea, don Quijote's beloved, took her name from the adjective *dulce*, meaning 'sweet', underlying her sweet character (at least in don Quijote's distorted vision of a common pig farmer). More complex is the genesis of the name Rocinante: in Spanish *rocín* refers to a 'work horse', while *ante* assumes different functions, as an adverbial suffix ('before') or as a marker

[8] The proper names analysed in this part of the article were chosen to represent various translatological strategies adapted by the Pandits. An interested reader may find more examples of names of *Don Quijote*'s characters and their Sanskrit equivalents chosen by Nityanand Shastri and Zadoo in Dimitrov (2019: C–CI).

denoting ‘in front of’. In this sense, the name of don Quijote’s ride would mean ‘the one that before was a working horse’ / ‘the horse in front of [all the others]’ / ‘the foremost of horses’. Following the example of other translators and not knowing the original Spanish meaning of the names, Shastri and Zadoo did not aim at rendering the names in Sanskrit despite the fact that the meaningful names often occur in Sanskrit literature and, in the case of *Don Quijote*, such strategy would help to keep the connotations intended by Cervantes. Nevertheless, the Pandits’ choice to not adapt the proper names cannot be considered a flaw, even if, as we shall see, the Sanskrit translation of Dulcinea’s name is idiosyncratic. Although it was possible, Shastri and Zadoo could not render it phonetically because of the hiatus that must be avoided in Sanskrit (the same was the case of Briareus) but their modification conveyed a meaningful result that can influence the perception of the character itself. *Dolasenā* represents a compound of two words: *dola*, ‘swinging, shaking to and fro’, and *senā*, ‘spear, army’, and can be translated as ‘swinging spear / army’. Such a rendering is openly violating Cervantes’s intent, purely comical, giving a sort of altisonant or heroic valence to a name that does not include such connotation. Similar adaptive choices are present elsewhere in the Pandits’ translation, to mention only the case of Angelica, rendered into Sanskrit as *Añjalikā*, which means ‘a little mouse’, a term rarely occurring and attested only lexicographically. Lastly, the Pandits’ choice concerning the rendering of the name of the wizard Frestón (*Phrisṭana*), contains a *sandhi* imprecision, where the sibilant consonant has not been cerebralised at the contact with the following cerebral consonant (as in the phonetically correct way in which they rendered Rocinante as *Rojinaṇṭa*). Most probably, the cerebralisation of *t* resulted from the common practice of adapting as such every dental sound in English. However, in this case, more proper would have been to avoid cerebralisation whatsoever and, as a consequence, a *sandhi* irregularity. The phonetic rendering of the given names in Sanskrit contains one more inaccuracy: Sancho Panza and Rocinante are called *Sāṃcopāṃja* and *Rojinaṇṭa*, names in which a sibilant sound would have been more appropriate than the palatal *j*. However, most probably the choice of Shastri and Zadoo was dictated by the occurrence of *z* and *s* in the names in Jarvis’s adaptation. Not knowing Spanish phonetics, the Pandits assumed that *z* and *s* are pronounced in the same way as in English and substituted them with *j* which in modern Indian languages can be pronounced as *z*, a sound that does not exist in Sanskrit.

3 The translations in comparison: renderings of the windmill episode

As we shall see, some problematic translatological issues can be observed on the example of one of the most famous episodes from Cervantes’s novel: the windmill adventure that occurs in the first part of the novel, in its eighth chapter. Immediately after the meeting with Sancho Panza, when the farmer decides to serve don Quijote as his squire, the two characters encounter on their path some windmills. The knight mistakes them for giants and, despite Sancho’s warnings, decides to attack.

The narrative segment of the windmill episode offers a relevant insight into strategies and dynamics of rendering Cervantes's text by Jarvis, as well as Nityanand Shastri and Zadoo. Apart from the proper names mentioned above, other particular aspects posed a challenge to the Pandits' work. Among them were the need of coining neologisms to denote extraneous concepts not present in Sanskrit, the struggle with conveying concepts so culturally distant from the Indian reality and maintaining the composition and style of the work.

For instance, a passage from an initial dialogue between don Quijote and his squire:

> Cervantes[9]
> […] *porque ves allí, amigo Sancho Panza, donde se descubren treinta o pocos más* ***desaforados gigantes****, con quien pienso hacer batalla y quitarles a todos las vidas* […]. (Rico 2015: 103)
>
> Jarvis[10]
> […] look yonder, friend Sancho Panza, where you may discover somewhat more than thirty **monstrous giants**, with whom I intend to fight, and take away all their lives […]. (Dimitrov 2019: 40)
>
> Shastri and Zadoo
> *itaḥ paśya, mitra sāṃcopāṃja! etān triṃśadadhikān* ***rākṣasān*** | *etān yuyutsur aham* | *eteṣāṃ prāṇān apahartum icchāmi* | (Dimitrov 2019: 41)

At a preliminary analysis it appears evident that the Pandits divided this passage into several shorter units, contrary to the original text and Jarvis's rendering. Moreover, Jarvis's translation of *desaforados gigantes* as *monstrous giants*—imprecise in itself—is responsible for a further imprecision in the Sanskrit adaptation. First of all, the adjective *desaforado* generally means 'unbridled, unrestrained', according to the definition given in the *Diccionario de la lengua castellana* (*que obra sin ley ni fuero*—'who operates / behaves without laws nor jurisdiction'—, *fuero de lo común*—'out of ordinary') (DLC 1914: 339). Jarvis's adaptation of *desaforados* as 'monstrous' made the Pandits to choose a Sanskrit equivalent that would comprehend the idea of 'monstrous' and 'repulsive', namely *rākṣasa*, which according to the Sanskrit dictionaries denotes usually a 'demon', despite the fact that 'giant' could have been approximately conveyed as *mahāpuruṣa* for instance, and accompanied by an appropriate adjective (absent in the Sanskrit translation).

Similar issues are present also in the continuation of the same sentence, in which don Quijote explains to Sancho that his fight against the giants / mills is a *buena guerra*:

---

9 All the quotations from the original early modern Spanish *Don Quijote* are based on the recent and most authoritative critical edition of Cervantes's work carried out under the aegis of Francisco Rico in 2015.

10 All the quotations from Jarvis's translation published in 1907 in *The World's Classics* series edited by James Fritzmaurice-Kelly are given here after Dimitrov (2019).

Cervantes
[…] *que ésta es **buena guerra**, y es gran servicio de Dios quitar tan mala simiente de sobre la faz de la tierra* […]. (Rico 2015: 103)

Jarvis
[…] for it is **lawful war**, and doing God good service to take away so wicked a generation from off the face of the earth […]. (Dimitrov 2019: 40)

Shastri and Zadoo
dharmyo' yaṃ saṃgrāmaḥ | *yato bhūmitale' syā duṣṭasantatyāḥ samunmūlaneneśvarasyāpi mahān kāryabhāro laghūkṛto bhavet* | (Dimitrov 2019: 41)

Jarvis translated *buena guerra* as 'lawful war', even though the expression denotes 'fighting with noble spirit', an expression pertaining to the chivalry lexicon well attested in literature and so registered by the *Diccionario de la lengua castellana* (DLC 1914: 526). The English translator's inaccuracy influenced the rendering proposed by Shastri and Zadoo as *dharmya saṃgrāma*, literally 'a fight according to the Dharma / righteous war',[11] suggesting a fight according to the universal principle, while in the Spanish original the conveyed idea denotes a guiding principle proper only for the code of a knight and his ethics.

A similar inaccuracy, not erroneous *per se* but obscuring the meaning intended by Cervantes, occurs in the translations of the following passage:

Cervantes
[…] *en el espacio que yo voy a entrar con ellos en **fiera** y desigual batalla* […]. (Rico 2015: 104)

Jarvis
[…] whilst I engage with them in a **fierce** and unequal combat […]. (Dimitrov 2019: 40)

Shastri and Zadoo
*ebhiḥ saha **bhīṣaṇa**viṣamasaṃgrāmatatparasya mama* […] | (Dimitrov 2019: 41)

The Spanish adjective *fiero/-a* (Lat. *ferus/-a*, 'wild, untamed, uncivilised') denotes *bruto indómito, cruel y carnicero* ('a wild untamable person, cruel and bloodthirsty') (DLC 1914: 475); applying such connotation to the giants *desaforados*, Cervantes implied an idea of a 'wild clash' against 'untamed creatures'. Jarvis's choice apparently seems to lose such subtle connotation of meaning, grasping only a superficial

11 The adjective *dharmya* comes from the noun *dharma* that denotes a manifold concept proper of several Indian philosophical and religious traditions. It is a term not easy to translate, as it signifies the same time 'virtue, morality, religious merit', 'customary observance or prescribed conduct', and 'Law or Justice personified' or 'that which is established or firm'. See Monier-Williams (2005: 510).

idea conveyed by the rather generic English adjective *fierce*. Relying on the English rendering, the Pandits furtherly accentuated the meaning advanced by Jarvis and, once again, charged it with horrifying connotations by using the term *bhīṣaṇa*, 'frightening, horrible, formidable'. Moreover, from the point of the intended sense, the employment of *bhīṣaṇa* could suggest that don Quijote is afraid to fight against his imaginary opponents; but, as we have observed in the previous passage, the knight is ready to welcome a *buena guerra*, to be fought according to his honour code.

Another passage testifies to how the Kashmiri Pandits were somehow misled by Jarvis's rendition, but, paradoxically, they fortuitously got closer to the Cervantes's original than the English translator:

> Cervantes
> […] *Non fuyades, **cobardes y viles criaturas**, que un solo caballero es el que os acomete* […]. (Rico 2015: 104)
>
> Jarvis
> […] Fly not, ye **cowards and evil caitiffs**; for it is a single knight who assaults you […]. (Dimitrov 2019: 42)
>
> Shastri and Zadoo
> […] ***kātarāḥ, nīcāḥ, duṣṭāḥ**, mā palāyata; aham ekākī vīro yuṣmān abhiyāsyan āgacchāmi* […] | (Dimitrov 2019: 43)

In the early modern Spanish original, Cervantes recurred to the specification *viles*: *vil* denotes a status or a person described as 'low, infamous', generally devoid of moral connotations; on the other hand, Jarvis translated the adjective as 'evil', placing it as a specification for 'caitiffs', an expression which was supposed to render *criaturas* (lit. 'creatures, beings'). At a closer analysis, it is clear that Jarvis's intention resulted in a pleonastic effect: according to the *Collins English Dictionary*, 'caitiff' denotes already by itself 'a cowardly or base person' (CED 1991: 226).[12] In order to render the passage in question Shastri and Zadoo resorted to the use of a string of adjectives: *kātarāḥ, nīcāḥ, duṣṭāḥ*, 'cowardly, low, evil'. It appears that while the first and third adjectives seem to be direct renditions from Jarvis's translation, the second, *nīca*, (much closer to Cervantes's *viles*) was presumably added due to its well-attested occurrence as an offensive expression in Sanskrit literature.[13]

Apart from the already presented translatological challenges encountered by the Pandits, one more, of different character, is worth mentioning, as it played an

---

12 As noted by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word 'caitiff' is attested in the Middle English Period, the earliest evidence dated to around 1325 (see OED). By the Jarvis's time, it was already obsolete and, according to the *Middle English Compendium*, denoted '(a) A miserable or unfortunate person, a wretch; a poor man, one of low birth; (b) a wicked man, scoundrel, one who is cowardly or covetous' (see MEC).

13 *Nīca*, 'low, vile, inferior', as an offensive term or a negative attribute occurs in Sanskrit epic and classical *kāvya* literature. See Monier-Williams (2005: 565).

important role in the rendition of Cervantes's novel into Sanskrit. Due to the lack of specific expressions and words denoting particular extraneous objects and concepts, Shastri and Zadoo were forced to coin several neologisms and adapted preexisting Sanskrit words with new meanings. Some of them occur in the chapter describing the fights against the windmills:

Cervantes	Jarvis	Shastri and Zadoo
molino	windmill	[*vāyu*(*vi*)*cālita*]*peṣaṇīyantra*
aspa	sail	*vātapaṭa*
piedra del molino	millstone	*peṣaṇī*

The term *peṣaṇī* means in Sanskrit any kind of 'grind-stone', but in the translation of *Don Quijote* it serves to denote a specific stone, a millstone, and becomes a basis for the newly created compound [*vāyu*(*vi*)*cālita*]*peṣaṇīyantra* than can be literally translated as 'a grind-stone device [moved by the wind]'. Moreover, as noted by Dragomir Dimitrov, this neologism was adopted by the Pandits under the influence of *vāyu-peṣaṇī* proposed for 'windmill' by Vaman Shivram Apte in his *Student's English-Sanskrit Dictionary* (Dimitrov 2019: XCVII). In fact, in the mentioned work, Apte gives two possible translations of the word 'windmill': *vāyucālyaṃ cakraṃ* and *vāyupeṣaṇī* (Apte 1893: 457). *Vātapaṭa*, a previously existing compound meaning 'wind-cloth, sail', without the specific context denotes a sail of the ship, as sail in the English language (Monier-Williams 2005: 934).[14]

In the whole episode of the windmill fight, the most problematic sequence is the one describing the exact moment of don Quijote's attack. Due to the inherent difficulties of Cervantes's syntax, Jarvis's inaccuracies and the occurrence of vocabulary pertaining to the chivalry lexicon, the translation of Shastri and Zadoo inadvertently distorts the image and impedes the frenetic rhythm of the narration in Cervantes's original text:

> Cervantes
> [...] *bien cubierto de su* ***rodela****, con la* ***lanza en el ristre****, arremetió a todo galope de Rocinante y embistió con el primero molino que estaba delante; y dándole una lanzada en el aspa, la volvió el viento con tanta furia, que hizo la lanza pedazos,* ***llevándose tras sí al caballo y al caballero, que fue rodando muy maltrecho por el campo*** [...]. (Rico 2015: 104)

14 The compound occurs already in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* (for example in KSS XII, 34.174) a collection of Indian legends and folk tales by Somadeva (11th century). In this case, Apte's *Dictionary* was not helpful for the Pandits, because it does not register 'wind-cloth'. The author proposes some translations for the 'sail', but most of them are the compounds referring directly to the ship's sail, like for example *nauvasanaṃ-vastraṃ*, lit. 'ship cloth', as *nau* denotes 'a ship or a boat' and *vasana* and *vastra* both mean 'a cloth, garment'. See Apte (1893: 374).

Jarvis
[…] being well covered with his **buckler**, and setting his **lance in the rest**, he rushed on as fast as Rosinante could gallop, and attacked the first mill before him; and running his lance into the sail, the wind whirled it about with so much violence that it broke the lance to shivers, **dragging horse and rider after it**, **and tumbling them over and over on the plain, in very evil plight** […]. (Dimitrov 2019: 42)

Shastri and Zadoo
[…] ***kavacenā****tmānaṃ susaṃcchādya,* ***kuntaṃ subaddhaṃ kṛtvā ca****, rojinaṇṭadhāvanaśaktyanurūpayā tvarayā dhāvat tasya purato vartamānāṃ prathamāṃ peṣaṇīṃ samācakrāma | tasyā vātapaṭe kuntaṃ prāveśayat | prabalavāyuvegena paribhrāmitaṃ vāyupaṭaṃ tasya kuntaṃ khaṇḍaśo' karot | anyac ca, vāyupaṭākṛṣṭo'* ***sau saturaṃgamo durgatiṃ prāpyānekavāraṃ bhūmitale papāta*** | (Dimitrov 2019: 43)

Once again, Shastri and Zadoo, splitting the whole sentence from Jarvis's rendering, that mirrored the textual unity in Cervantes's original, simplified the complexity of this scene and significantly slowed down the rhythm of the action. Aside from structural considerations, the Pandits must have encountered several difficulties connected to specific terminology. In the first image, Cervantes portrayed don Quijote covering himself with his small shield and preparing for the attack by positioning the lance in the rest. However, the Sanskrit translation presents here two considerable problems: first of all, *rodela*, rendered correctly by Jarvis as 'buckler', was translated by Shastri and Zadoo as *kavaca*, a term denoting 'armour, coat of mail, any covering'. The technical expression from the chivalry lexicon, *lanza en el ristre*, '[setting his] lance in the rest', as conveyed by Jarvis, was amplified by the Pandits in a sequence held by a gerundial form from the stem *kṛ*-: *kuntaṃ subaddhaṃ kṛtvā ca*, 'and having rendered the lance well bound / clenched'. In the first case, it appears more than plausible that the choice of the Pandits to translate buckler as *kavaca* derived from a misunderstanding of the English word, which perfectly conveys the idea behind *rodela*, a term denoting a small round shield. The translation of the term could have been rendered correctly by recurring to the Sanskrit term *carman*, 'shield'—a noun well attested in the *itihāsa* literature, and suggested by the Apte's *The Student's English-Sanskrit Dictionary* used by the Pandits—perhaps accompanied by a further adjectival specification. The issue with 'lance in the rest' is more complex: it seems that the Pandits were not aware of the fact that the 'rest' denotes not a state but a specific part of the armour, namely a small metal hook attached to the side of the breast-plate serving to support the heavy weight of the weapon. The expression employed by Shastri and Zadoo suggests that don Quijote was firmly holding the lance and not positioning it for the attack. In consequence, the Sanskrit translation of the sentence in question significantly changes the scene drawn by Cervantes and slows the action of an intentionally dynamic and chaotic sequence.

The following inaccuracies in the Pandits' translation of the analysed sentence mirror the interpretation proposed by Jarvis. The English translator freely rendered

the fragment *llevándose tras sí al caballo y al caballero, que fué rodando muy maltrecho por el campo* as 'dragging horse and rider after it, and tumbling them over and over on the plain, in very evil plight', even though it could be translated as 'dragging after it the horse and the knight, who rolled much battered across the field'. In Jarvis's understanding, in the English translation both Quijote and Rocinante tumbled through the field, despite the fact that in the early modern Spanish text there is no plural form. Moreover, for an unknown reason, Jarvis substituted the original adjective *maltrecho* ('battered, damaged, injured') with the expression 'in very evil plight', prompting the Pandits to render it as *durgatiṃ prāpya*, lit. 'having reached misfortune'.

As a last point, some considerations can be made about the diastratic asset of specific sections from the English and Sanskrit translations and their relation with Cervantes's original text. After the attack against the windmills and the fall of Quijote, a humorous dialogue between the knight and his squire follows, in which Sancho exclaims:

> Cervantes
> [...] ***¡Válame Dios!*** *—dijo Sancho—. ¿No le dije yo a* ***vuestra merced*** *que mirase bien lo que hacía* [...]. (Rico 2015: 104)
>
> Jarvis
> [...] **God save me**, quoth Sancho, did not I warn **you** to have a care of what you did [...]. (Dimitrov 2019: 42)
>
> Shastri and Zadoo
> [...] ***trāhi, trāhi****, vimṛśyakāryakaraṇe' haṃ* ***tvāṃ*** *pūrvam eva prābodhayam* | (Dimitrov 2019: 43)

In their translation of this passage, Shastri and Zadoo rendered the interjection 'God save me' as repeated *trāhi*, the second singular imperative form from the stem *trai-*, 'to protect, defend, preserve', omitting the address to the god. Moreover, the translations of Jarvis and Shastri and Zadoo seem to fail to convey specific nuances of the original text which enrich the overall flavour of every Cervantes's sentence. The honorific *vuestra merced* ('Your Grace') is omitted and substituted with direct *you / tvam* in both Jarvis's and the Pandits' renderings, which do not mirror the subordinated position of a servant to his master. Such evident or more subtle modalities in the *Quijote* are the key elements which enlighten the comical relation and interactions between the knight and his squire.

The same translatological imprecision concerning the different and humorous levels of the language used by the two characters is perceivable also in don Quijote's reply to Sancho:

> Cervantes
> ***Calla,*** *amigo Sancho* [...]. (Rico 2015: 105)

> Jarvis
> **Peace**, friend Sancho […]. (Dimitrov 2019: 42)
>
> Shastri and Zadoo
> ***śāntiṃ kuru**, mitra sāṃcopāṃja* | (Dimitrov 2019: 43)

Calla is the imperative form from the verb *callar*, 'to stay silent, to not speak', and, in its imperative form, it is still used even nowadays, in modern Spanish, as an idiomatic expression to express the command 'shut up!', with different degrees of harshness. Generally, Cervantes introduced such colloquial expressions in the linguistic repertoire of don Quijote on purpose, to mark the two faces of the character himself: the knight who employed the altisonant and magniloquent register proper of the chivalry tradition and its novels, and the minor landowner interacting with his servant, reducing him to silence by recurring to low and comical diastratic levels of the language. In fact, the omission of such nuances and linguistic jumps by Jarvis in his translation was heavily criticised, as it stripped Cervantes's novel of humour and vivacity. As noted by Henry Edward Watts, Jarvis' rendering is

> […] dull, commonplace, and unhumorous […] generally correct and judicious, but certainly not faithful, and it is not easy to discover why it has become so generally accepted, unless it is that Jarvis's dullness has served him for a warrant of morality. (Watts 1888: 12)[15]

Jarvis's pale translation of the excerpt quoted above as 'peace' was literarily rendered by the Pandits as *śāntiṃ kuru*, 'make silence', although more suitable for conveying the comicality would have been, for instance, *tvadvadanaṃ / tvadmukhaṃ pidhehi / apidhehi*, 'shut your mouth'.

4 Concluding remarks

Summing up, as we have seen from the several examples quoted from the windmill fight episode and respective passages from the translations of Jarvis and Shastri and Zadoo, in general, the Pandits' rendering closely followed the English translation. However, the inaccuracies occurring in the Jarvis's version influenced the Sanskrit text and, supplemented with the further modifications that must have been introduced by Shastri and Zadoo due to the phonetic and syntactic differences between English and Sanskrit, resulted in an even further distancing from Cervantes's original. Moreover, the Pandits, perhaps in order to manage the textual complexity already present in Jarvis's version, split the text in several smaller units, simplifying the articulation of the diction, often sustained by an intricate syntactical and morphological frame. Such a solution resulted in a noticeable modification of the original structure of the text

15 For further details concerning the assessment of Jarvis's translation see also Dimitrov 2019: XVI–XVII.

and did not give justice to the overall complexity of *Don Quijote* as a literary text. The Sanskrit used by the Pandits is devoid of long compounds and operates with rather simple grammatical forms, in addition to a limited and well-measured vocabulary; these elements resulted nevertheless in a reasonably balanced and well-structured translation. However, because of relying on the English medium, it did not enlighten the extreme complexity and richness of the original and did not convey successfully the reality of the *Don Quijote* as a literary universe created by Cervantes.

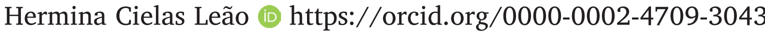
Funding

This article is part of the project *How Hard Can a Dead Heart Beat? Reflections on Modern Sanskrit Literature*, led by Professor Lidia Sudyka and funded by the National Science Center, Poland (grant no. 2021/43/B/HS2/02046).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID


Hermina Cielas Leão https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4709-3043

David Pierdominici Leão https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6725-3219

References

Apte, Vaman Shivram. 1893. *The Student's English-Sanskrit Dictionary*. Bombay: Mrs. Radhabai Atmaram Sagoon.

Byron, William. 1978. *Cervantes: A Biography*. London: Cassell.

Cascardi, Anthony J., ed. 2002. *The Cambridge Companion to Cervantes*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

CED = 1991. 'Caitiff'. In *Collins English Dictionary*. Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers.

Dimitrov, Dragomir, ed. 2019. *Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra Ḍān Kvikṣoṭaḥ (Chapters I.2, I.3, I.8, I.10, I.16, I.17, I.18 & I.23). Translated from English into Sanskrit by Jagaddhar Zadoo & Nityanand Shastri*. Pune: Department of Pali, Savitribai Phule Pune University.

DLC = 1914. *Diccionario de la Lengua Castellana por la Real Academia Española*. Madrid: Imprenta de los Sucesores de Hernando.

Maurya, Vibha, transl. 2006. *Migel de Servāntes Don Kikhote*. Delhi: Confluence International.

Maurya, Vibha, transl. 2015. *Migel de Servāntes Don Kikhote (Lā Māṃcā ke Śūrvīr kī Gāthā)*. Delhi: Pairabel International.

McCrory, Donald. 2002. *No Ordinary Man: The Life and Times of Miguel de Cervantes*. London: Peter Owen Ltd.

MEC = 'Caitiff'. In *Middle English Compendium*. Accessed 26 September 2025. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED6478/track?counter=2&search_id=3382788

Monier-Williams, Monier. 2005. *A Sanskrit English Dictionary. Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.

OED = 'Caitiff'. In *Oxford English Dictionary*. Accessed 26 September 2025. https://www.oed.com/dictionary/caitiff_n?tab=factsheet#10655582

Pandita, S.N. 2001. 'Sir Aurel Stein and Kashmiri Scholars'. *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* 5 (2): 54–60.

Pandita, S.N. 2002. *Western Indologists and Sanskrit Savants of Kashmir*. New Delhi: Siddharth Publications.

Pegum, Caroline. 2009. 'The Artistic and Literary Career of Charles Jervas (c. 1675–1739)'. MPhil Thesis. Birmingham: University of Birmingham.

Rico, Francisco, ed. 2015. *Miguel de Cervantes. Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Madrid: Real Academia Española.

Watts, Henry Edward. 1888. *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. A New Edition done into English with Notes, Original and Selected, and a New Life of the Author by Henry Edward Watts. In Five Volumes. Vol. I. Biography; Criticism; Bibliography*. London: Bernard Quaritch.

FOLIA ORIENTALIA—BIBLIOTHECA 2 (2025)
DOI 10.24425/for.2025.156882

Marta Karcz

Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland | marta.m.karcz@gmail.com

Modern Sanskrit Translations of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyats*: Navigating Cultural and Linguistic Landscapes

Abstract This article explores two modern Sanskrit translations of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyats*, created independently by Pandit Adibhatla Narayana Das (1937) and Professor Narahari Govind Suru (1981). Both scholars worked from Edward FitzGerald's English version, adapting it into Sanskrit according to classical poetic conventions. Through a comparative analysis, the study examines the translators' differing choices of metre, diction, and cultural adaptation, highlighting how each negotiates the challenges of rendering Khayyam's philosophical quatrains within the rigid structure and aesthetic expectations of Sanskrit poetry. Attention is also given to strategies of domestication and foreignisation, revealing how each translator reinterprets the Persian original within an Indian literary and intellectual context. Ultimately, these translations not only exemplify creative engagement with classical Sanskrit forms but also illuminate broader processes of cross-cultural mediation and the modern reinvention of Sanskrit literary expression.

Keywords Modern Sanskrit literature, translation studies, Omar Khayyam, *Rubaiyat*, Narayana Das, Narahari Govind Suru, cross-cultural poetics

1 Introduction

In the 19th century, Omar Khayyam,[1] a Persian scholar from the late 11th and early 12th centuries, garnered renown in the Western world for a series of four-line poems known as *Rubaiyats* attributed to him. His poetic works resonated deeply with individuals across diverse cultural realms, to the extent that two Indian scholars of the 20th century were inspired to render his verses into Sanskrit.

[1] Omar Khayyam was a polymath, famous for his contributions to mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and poetry, who lived in the late 11th and early 12th centuries in Seljuk Empire. As a mathematician, Khayyam worked on geometry and developed methods for solving certain cubic equations. In the field of astronomy, the greatest achievement of Omar Khayyam was the reform of the Islamic calendar. He was commissioned by Seljuk sultan Malik-Shāh to undertake the necessary astronomical observations. As a philosopher, Khayyam considered himself an intellectual disciple of Avicenna. See also Boyle (1975: 658–664).

© 2025 The Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

One of them, Pandit Adibhatla Narayana Das, was so captivated by the English translation of the *Rubaiyats* that at the age of 60 he made the choice to learn Persian in order to study Omar Khayyam's work as thoroughly as possible (Narayana Das 1937: i–ii). His effort resulted in publishing the translations of the *Rubaiyats* into Sanskrit and Telugu. Around 50 years later, a translation by another Sanskritologist, Professor Suru, was also published. Both Narayana Das and Professor Suru sought to create translations within the rules of Sanskrit poetry.

This research aims to shed light on how these translations reflect broader themes of cultural exchange and literary innovation, thereby contributing to our understanding of modern Sanskrit literature's evolution.

2 The *Rubaiyats*

The *Rubaiyats* are witty, bold and sometimes cynical poems in which Khayyam ridicules various philosophical and theological trends of his time and struggles with a sense of existential futility. They depict a man tormented by questions about the nature of reality and eternity, the impermanence and uncertainty of life, and man's relationship with God. The poet questions the existence of both God and the afterlife and ridicules unshakable faith. He also emphasizes the weakness and ignorance of humans. The poet seeks peace in a joyful appreciation of the fleeting, sensual beauty of the material world. However, even this cannot distract him from bitter reflections on fundamental metaphysical issues (Seyed-Gohrab 2012).

The majority of the *Rubaiyats* are written in Persian; however, there are also twenty-five Arabic poems attributed to Khayyam, attested by Muslim historians from 13th and 14th centuries. Little attention was paid to his poems by his contemporaries, and it was not until two centuries after his death that a few quatrains appeared under his name. Several of them contained views contrary to those propounded in other works by Khayyam. Therefore, some scholars have hypothesized that they were attributed to him because of his fame. For this reason, some scholars even doubt whether Omar Khayyam wrote poems at all. However, John Andrew Boyle, a British Orientalist and historian, pointed out that many other Persian scholars including Avicenna, Ghazali and Tusi, produced poetry. According to him, it is possible, therefore, that poetry for Khayyam was a pastime in his leisure time from scholarly work (Boyle 1975).

It was Edward FitzGerald's translation of Omar Khayyam's poems that made him famous in the modern period. It was published for the first time in 1859. FitzGerald's translations are remarkably free and creative, allowing him to introduce his own ingenuity and vigour. A large number of stanzas have been actually paraphrased, and some cannot be attributed to the source material at all. Moreover, although each of *Rubaiyats* forms a complete poem in itself, FitzGerald arranged the poems into a coherent whole with intellectual unity. *Rubaiyats* have been translated into almost every major language and are largely responsible for shaping European perceptions

of Persian poetry. In fact, both Narayana Das and Suru became acquainted with the *Rubaiyats* precisely through FitzGerald's translation, and it was this that served as the source material in their work (Biegstraaten 2008).

In the 1930s, the *Rubaiyats* gained considerable popularity in India. Poet Harivansh Rai Bachchan (1907–2003) translated them into Hindi. Omar Khayyam's poetry also inspired his own work. In 1935, he published a collection of four poems under the title *Madhuśālā*. It presents a vision of an egalitarian society in which caste and religious differences are abolished in favour of national unity. Like the Persian poet, Bachchan criticised religious orthodoxy, social hierarchies and intolerance, promoting humanism and Epicureanism. The poems allude to ideas of Indian nationalism, particularly in the context of the independence movement led by Mahatma Gandhi (Castaing 2012).

3 Sanskrit Translations of the *Rubaiyats*

The author of the first Sanskrit translation of *Rubaiyats* was Pandit Ajjada Adibhatla Narayana Das (1864–1945). He was a poet, musician, linguist, dancer, and philosopher from Andhra Pradesh. He was most famous as an exponent of *harikatha*, a solo narrative in which the storyteller explores a traditional Hindu theme.[2] Narayana Das is sometimes referred to as the father of modern *harikatha* in Andhra Pradesh. He created his own *harikatha* narratives, drawing inspiration from Indian and English literature. He was also a talented musician (Lal 2004: 145). Narayana Das was the first Principal of Maharaja's Government College of Music and Dance established by Maharaja Vizianagaram in 1919. At the court of Maharaja Vizianagaram, Narayana Das learnt about Hindustani music and introduced to the Music College a unique style of classical music tradition, a blend of Hindustani and Carnatic styles, which is known today as the *Vizianagaram style*. This polyglot was versatile in nine languages: Telugu, Sanskrit, Tamil, Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, English, Arabic and Persian. He was the author of translations into Sanskrit and Telugu, in addition to creating original literary works in Telugu, English and Sanskrit. His literary output includes poems, *harikathas*, prose works, musical works, dramas, treatises on philosophy, literature and Vedic studies and even children's literature (Parthasarathi 2022).

Narayana Das made clear the reason why he decided to translate the *Rubaiyats* himself. He believed that Edward FitzGerald's English translations did not capture the essence of the poetry of Omar Khayyam. He released his translation in 1937 under the

2 *Harikatha* is a form of solo narration from southern India, originally closely associated with the cult of Vishnu. It originated around the 16th–17th centuries as a way of propagating Vishnuism. It contains elements of chanting, comic improvisation and references to contemporary themes. The storyteller is called a Haridasa or Bhagavatar. Initially, only men were the performers, but after India's independence, *harikatha* began to be performed by middle-class women as well. See also Lal (2004: 145–146).

title *Rubaiyat of Omar Khaiyam with English Translation by Edward FitzGerald, Translated into Sanskrit and Dēsyāndhram*. The publication comprises 110 poems; each item is presented in Persian (both Persian script and Latin transliteration), FitzGerald's English translation, and translations into Sanskrit and Telugu. In the introduction, he states that for the translation he used the original text of the *Rubaiyats* in Persian and also the English translation by Edward FitzGerald. Narayana Das claims that when he read Edward FitzGerald's translation of *Rubaiyats*, he decided to learn Persian and then study this masterpiece in the original language. Moreover, he states that his translations into both languages are more literal and precise than FitzGerald's version. Therefore, to prove his point, he translated into Sanskrit separately Persian original text and FitzGerald's rendering—thus, each verse has two versions in Sanskrit and two versions in Telugu.[3]

The man who decided to translate *Rubaiyats* into Sanskrit 50 years after Narayana Das, was Professor Narahari Govind Suru (1898–1980). After completing his MA in 1923, he joined Fergusson College as Professor of Sanskrit and Ardhamagadhi. In 1924 he became a member of the Deccan Education Society and worked there until 1932. He served as Principal at Nowroji Wadia College (1951–1959) and then at Ruparel College, Bombay (1959–1964). From 1964 to 1973, he acted as secretary of the Modern Education Society. He was also associated with the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, where he served as treasurer from 1948 to 1960. As part of his scholarly and research activities, he prepared critical editions of classical texts, the most important of which are *Gaūḍavaho* and *Karpūramañjarī*. He was a versatile scholar and an outstanding educationist who dedicated his life to education and learning (Muley 2015: 655–655).

The title of Professor Suru's Sanskrit translation of the *Rubaiyats* is *Umaraśataka*. The word *umara* is a Sanskritized form of the name Omar, while *śataka* literally means 'consisting of a hundred'. This term united with the name of the author, often served as the title of collection of Sanskrit verses meaning 'a collection of 100 stanzas' (e.g. *Amaruśataka* i.e. 'The hundred stanzas of Amaru'). Indeed, Professor Suru selected exactly one hundred stanzas for this publication. The book does not identify the English translator, but it is clear from the included English texts that Suru used FitzGerald's version. The book was released in 1981—about a year after the demise of the author of the translation.

Umaraśataka is preceded by two introductions. The first one, written in English, was provided by Professor Aravind Mangrulker and titled *A Handful of Flowers*. It contains short characterization of Omar Khayyam oeuvre, general remarks on the translation by Professor Suru and more detailed comments on selected verses. The second introduction was written by D.D. Bahulikar and it has a form of a poem

[3] I do not claim proficiency in Persian; this analysis evaluates the translations from the perspective of a Sanskritologist. Although consultations with Professor Tomasz Gacek (Jagiellonian University in Krakow) allowed me to better understand the free manner of FitzGerald's translation and the differences between it and the Persian original, in this paper I limit the scope of my research to indirect translations from FitzGerald and analyse them. I hope that my article might inspire scholars who know both Sanskrit and Persian proficiently to conduct more in-depth study of this subject in the future.

consisting of nine stanzas in Sanskrit. Bahulikar, himself a Sanskrit poet, also edited the translation of Professor Suru.

4 Comparison of translations by Narayana Das and Suru

Analysing the two translations into Sanskrit, one can see that the translators, namely Suru and Narayana Das approached their task quite differently. One of the most important differences is that they chose a completely different kind of metre. Metre is an essential component of Sanskrit poetry. Works should be composed using a certain rhythm, which imposes restrictions on the writer in the composition's structure. However, the metre is also associated with the semantic layer—as it is an important aspect of poetic creation, which contributes to the development of a particular mood and emotions in the recipient.

In the introduction to the translation of Professor Suru, Professor Aravind Mangrulker praises him for choosing a metre called *mandākrantā* (Mangrulker 1981: 5–11). The name of the metre means 'slow-stepping' or 'slowly advancing'. A stanza composed in this metre consists of four lines of seventeen syllables each; it typically starts with a sequence of heavy syllables, moves through lighter ones, and ends with alternating light and heavy syllables, producing a slow-to-accelerating rhythm. Thus, the melodic line of the verse begins slowly, and after a while it accelerates noticeably, emphasizing the emotions depicted in the stanza (Cielas 2014: 35–40). Scholars of Sanskrit poetics held that the *mandākrantā* metre is especially apt for expressing feelings of separation from a beloved. Therefore, this metre was most often chosen by poets composing *sandeśakāvyas*—messenger poems usually depicting an exiled lover sending a message to his separated beloved through a messenger, which could be a natural phenomenon, animal or human being (Szczepanik 2014: 17–20). It seems that the *mandākrantā* also highlights very well the emotions contained in the *Rubaiyats*—the inner confusion of a man struggling with questions about the true nature of reality, eternity and the existence of God. The slow pace suits the gloomy mood and overall tone of the *Rubaiyats* perfectly and underscores the meaning of the original verse. Moreover, the emotions connected with this inner dilemma are somehow similar to the suffering of a man separated from his loved one.

Pandit Adibhatla Narayana Das employed two different kinds of metre. In his Sanskrit translation of FitzGerald's rendering, he used *anuṣṭubh śloka*, and in his Sanskrit translation of the Persian text he used *āryāgīti*. Similarly, both translations into Telugu are composed in different metres. The metre used in the translation from Persian—*gīti* has respectively 12, 18, 12 and 18 syllables in its four *pāda*s (Cieślikowski 2017: 69). *Śloka* is a 32-syllable verse, derived from the Vedic metre *anuṣṭubh*. It is one of the metres most commonly used by writers of classical Sanskrit literature. The *śloka* consists of four *pāda*s or quarter-verses of 8 syllables each. It can be said that it is one of the most basic metres, as it has been used in a wide variety of literary genres (Cieślikowski 2017: 64–66). According to Kṣemendra, a theoretician of Sanskrit literature from the 11th century, it was appropriate metre for both scientific texts

(*śāstra*) and poetry (*kāvya*). He also praised this metre for its clarity. Thus, it seems that *śloka* was also a suitable choice for rendering the meaning of the *Rubaiyats*. It should also be noted that, by choosing *śloka,* he made the original quatrains written in two lines.

The translations of FitzGerald's rendering of *Rubaiyats* by Professor Suru and Pandit Narayana Das are very different, mainly because of the kinds of metre employed by both translators. Decisions about metre had their impact on vocabulary and sentence structure. Although both translations convey the same general meaning, their visual appearance and line-lengths differ markedly. This is the reason why the translation of Professor Suru is twice as long as the translation of Narayana Das of the same verse. One translator had to condense the meaning into a shorter form, the other one had to extend it to fit the metre. Professor Suru in particular faced numerous issues in this matter. As Professor Mangrulker notices in the introduction: 'With its capacity to condense matter in a few compounded words, Sanskrit often poses a problem for the translator' (Mangrulker 1981: 10). This is clearly visible while comparing translation of Prof. Suru with the English rendering of the same verses. For example, in the verse 6,[4] he translated 'lips' as *dantacchada-yugalaka*—literally 'the pair of tooth covers' (Suru 1981: 3). In Sanskrit there are separate words for upper lip (*osṭha*) and lower lip (*adhara*), the mouth is *daśanacchada* or *dantacchada*, but in order to meet the metre requirements the translator had to add the word *yugalaka*—couple, although it would have been enough to use the dual number in the right case.

In some verses Professor Suru introduced even bigger changes. For example, in the verse 13,[5] he changed a metaphor in the second half of the stanza. Instead of 'Ah take the Cash and let the Credit go' he wrote *grāhyā yā bhoḥ karatalagatā tittirir no mayūrī yā śvo labhyā*,[6] that means 'Oh, hold the partridge that is in your hand, not the peacock that can be reached tomorrow'. As it can be noticed, the translator

4 'And David's Lips are lock't; but in divine
High piping Pehlevi, with "Wine! Wine! Wine!
Red Wine!"—the Nightingale cries to the Rose
That yellow Cheek of hers to incarnadine' (FitzGerald 2009: 19).

5 'Some for the Glories of This World; and some
Sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come;
Ah, take the Cash, and let the Credit go,
Nor heed the rumbie of a distant Drum' (FitzGerald 2009: 75).

6 *eke bhogān vibhavasulabhān aihikān mānayantē*
tāmyantyanye śrutinigaditaṃ svargasaukhyaṃ tu bhōktum
grāhyā yā bhoḥ karatalagatā tittirir no mayūrī
yā śvo labhyā, na khalu śṛṇuyā ḍiṇḍimaṃ dūraśabdam || (Suru 1981: 5).
Literally:
'Some regard earthly pleasures, easily attained through wealth;
Others strive to enjoy heavenly joys proclaimed in scriptures.
Oh, hold the partridge that is in your hand, not the peacock that can be reached tomorrow.
Do not listen to the distant sound of drum.'

replaced the cash and credit representing a sure profit and the possibility of even bigger profit in the future, with birds. *Tittiri* is a partridge, a small game bird that is obviously worth less than a beautiful peacock but is a sure gain. Thus, the message of the poem in Sanskrit and in English is the same, although it was expressed in a different way. The translator most probably was inspired by a Sanskrit proverbs *varam adya kapoto na śvo mayūraḥ*, meaning 'a pigeon today is better than a peacock tomorrow', or *varaṃ tatkālopanatā tittiriḥ na punardivasāṃtaritā mayūrī*—'a partridge obtained immediately is better than a peahen tomorrow' (Apte 1964). Professor Suru most likely adjusted it to the requirements of the metre. Similar proverbs teaching that a certain gain is better than a possibility of even bigger gain in the future, with the example of birds, exist in numerous languages, for example 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush' in English. A similar message can also be found in the fourth book of *Pañcatantra*, titled *Labdhapraṇāśam*—'Losing of Gain'.

Pandit Narayana Das while translating the FitzGerald's version of this verse[7] omitted this part and replaced it with words *pibahastagatāmṛtam* meaning 'drink the nectar in your hand', which are not present in the English version. While translating from the original text, he paraphrased it into *hastagataṃ mā tyākṣīḥ paspṛhathāmābhaviṣyadarthāya*,[8] literally: 'do not let go what is in your hand longing for what is yet to come'. In this case, instead of a metaphor he conveyed the meaning underlying it. There is no doubt that he communicated the sense of the poem, but it is clear that he simplified it.

While translating the *Rubaiyats*, both scholars had to deal with cultural references appearing in the poems. It may seem that they had to connect culturally very distant worlds. However, it should be remembered that Persian and Sanskrit as Indo-Iranian languages share history, literary heritage and some elements of their mythologies. Moreover, Muslim dynasties have ruled in large parts of India since the 13th century. These new rulers brought with them their own culture linked to the Persian language. During the reign of the Muslim dynasties in India, the Persian was an integral part of the state and was closely linked to the cultivation and consolidation of sovereign

---

7 *ślāghate apsarasaṃyajvā vayaṃdrākṣārasaṃstumaḥ*
śrāvyābhaveddūrabherī pibahastagatāmṛtam || (Narayana Das 1937: 25).
Literally:
'Worshiper praises apsaras we praise the grape nectar,
Let the far drum would be heard, drink the nectar in your hand.'

8 *nityaṃ svarganagaryāṃ ramyā apsarasa iti vadanti eke*
drākṣāsava evāyaṃ amanojña iti sarvadāpraśaṃsāmi
hastagataṃ mā tyākṣīḥ paspṛhathāmābhaviṣyadarthāya
kāmaṃ bhrātaḥ śrāvyaḥ syād eva daviṣṭha dundubhidhvānaḥ || (Narayana Das 1937: 25).
Literally:
'Some always say: "Delightful apsaras are in the heavenly city",
But I, instead, forever praise delightful wine.
Do not let go what is in your hand longing for what is yet to come.
O brother, indeed, even the distant sound of drum may be worth hearing.'

identity. Hence these literary traditions intermingled for centuries (Truschke 2016: 7). Over time, however, Persian declined as the language of culture and science in northern India, and much intellectual exchange shifted to English.

Both translators had to adapt the various proper names to Sanskrit diction and metre yet in such a way that they could still be recognizable to the reader. The scholars had to demonstrate the great ingenuity evident in proposing such changes without compromising the original. Therefore, in the Suru's translation of the verse 5,[9] the toponym Iram becomes just *iramanagarī*.[10] This is a kind of hint for the audience to immediately associate the name with the lost rich city of Iram, which, according to the Quran, was destroyed by God because of the sins of its inhabitants. In the same verse, Professor Suru adapted the name of the mythical king of Iran, Jamshid as *yamajita*. The name Jamshid is derived from Avestan *yima* meaning 'twin', which is related to Sanskrit Yama (*yama*), Hindu God of death and a twin brother of Yami (*yamī*). Therefore, such an adaptation of the name in translation seems to be a very successful choice by the translator. It may also be noted that in describing Jamshid's cup, Suru has added the epithet *saptarekhāṅkita*, literally—'marked with seven lines' which corresponds to FitzGerald's 'Sev'n-ring'd Cup'. According to Persian mythology, the magical cup filled with elixir of immortality indeed was circled by seven rings. Thus, the translator wanted to bring readers closer to this mythical artefact by describing it in more detail. While translating the same verse Pandit Narayana Das took completely different approach. He simply said *nāmamātrāviśiṣṭā vibhraṣṭhā naṣṭā purānarāḥ*,[11] meaning 'the ancients—distinguished only by name—have perished and been lost'. Thus, he omitted both proper names present in the FitzGerald's translation. The meaning of the verse is similar; however, it cannot be stated that he translated it very accurately**.**

The Sanskrit translations of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyats* by Pandit Narayana Das and Professor Suru can be analysed also through the lens of domestication and foreignization, as discussed by Lawrence Venuti (1995). Narayana Das's translation employs **domestication**, making significant adaptations to align with Sanskrit literary norms. It often omits proper names and focuses more on conveying the message of the poem than on accuracy. Conversely, Professor Suru's version, while incorporating similar imagery, retains the exotic quality of the source text by Sanskritizing proper

---

9 'Iram indeed is gone with all his Rose,
And Jamshyd's Sev'n-ring'd Cup where no one knows;
But still a Ruby kindles in the Vine,
And many a Garden by the Water blows' (FitzGerald 2009: 18).

10 *smartavyābhūd 'iram'nagarī tyājitā padmajātaṃ*
pātraṃ naṣṭaṃ kva yamajitaḥ saptarekhāṅkitaṃ yat
kiṃtu drākṣā vahita ruciraṃ raktamadyāpi ratnaṃ
puṣpāmodo jalataṭaruhāṃ jṛmbhate vāṭikāsu || (Suru 1981: 2).

11 *nāmamātrāviśiṣṭā vibhraṣṭhā naṣṭā purānarāḥ*
adyāpi phalitādrākṣā puṣpitā vanamallikā || (Narayana Das 1937: 11).

names (e.g. rendering 'Iram' as *iramanagarī*) and preserving original stylistic markers. This hybrid strategy, between domestication and foreignization, preserves the source text's distinct cultural identity and invites readers to engage with its 'otherness'. Thus, the translators' choices not only reflect differing aesthetic priorities but also mediate a complex dialogue between indigenous literary traditions and global cultural influences. For instance, he replaces FitzGerald's metaphor of 'cash and credit' with the altered Sanskrit proverb of the **crow and peacock**, ensuring cultural resonance for Sanskrit readers. Of course, in both cases the changes in translation were also motivated by the choice of metre. These strategies are not mutually exclusive, yet they demonstrate different approaches to the translator's role and the intended outcome of the translations.

5 Conclusion

Both translations are unusual yet fascinating publications. It is unlikely that these books were released to bring the contents of the *Rubaiyats* to Sanskrit readers. After all, at the time of publication, several English translations were available, as well as translations into some Indian languages. Thus, the translators' goals likely differed from the usual aim of simply transmitting content. It is probable that Professor Suru sought to demonstrate his expertise in Sanskrit while rendering the ideas of the *Rubaiyats* through techniques appropriate to classical Sanskrit poetry. It could also have been a kind of experiment on how certain content from another cultural background can be rendered in Sanskrit. Pandit Narayana Das probably had slightly different motives, as he translated the poems also into Telugu. Perhaps he really wanted to introduce the *Rubaiyats* to users of that language. Therefore, it is possible that the translation into Sanskrit was a side project. Possibly, like Professor Suru, he wanted to demonstrate his knowledge in Sanskrit, or it was a kind of experiment on how the same content would look translated into two languages by the same author.

In conclusion, a comparative analysis of Sanskrit translations of the *Rubaiyats* by Pandit Adibhatla Narayana Das and Professor Narahari Govind Suru demonstrate the difficulties faced by translators adapting their work to the requirements of classical Sanskrit poetic styles. Their works illustrate how the challenges of metre and linguistic economy in Sanskrit can drive innovative translation strategies. Rather than replicating FitzGerald's interpretation, each translator offers a unique interpretation that highlights the dynamic potential of cross-cultural literary transmission. Ultimately, these translations not only broaden the reception of Omar Khayyam's poetry but also contribute to the ongoing evolution of contemporary Sanskrit literature. It might also be seen as a form of manifesto—a translation into Sanskrit, the language of the gods, alongside a translation from Sanskrit into Persian,[12] could be a cultural link between Hindu and Muslim cultures.

---

[12] For more on cultural exchanges between Sanskrit and Persian traditions see Truschke (2016).

Funding

This article is part of the project *How Hard Can a Dead Heart Beat? Reflections on Modern Sanskrit Literature*, led by Professor Lidia Sudyka and funded by the National Science Center, Poland (grant no. 2021/43/B/HS2/02046).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

Marta Karcz https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6177-3758

References

Apte, Varman Shivram. 1964. *The Student's English-Sanskrit Dictionary*. Accessed 19 February 2025. https://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/6_sres/2_dict/aptees_u.htm.

Biegstraaten, Jos. 2008. 'Omar Khayyam (Impact on Literature and Society in the West)'. In *Encyclopaedia Iranica, online edition*. Accessed 19 February 2025. http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/khayyam-omar-impact-west.

Boyle, John Andrew. 2007 (1975). 'Umar Khayyām: Astronomer, Mathematician and Poet'. In *The Cambridge History of Iran. Volume IV: From the Arab Invasion to the Saljuqs*, edited by Richard N. Frye, 658–664. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Castaing, Anne. 2012. 'Vernacularizing Rubaiyat: The Politics of Madhushala in the Context of Indian Nationalism'. In *The Great 'Umar Khayyam: A Global Reception of the Rubáiyát*, edited by Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, 215–232. Leiden: Leiden University Press, Project MUSE.

Cielas, Hermina. 2014. '*Wolno krocząca*, czyli kilka uwag o uroku metrum mandakranta'. In *Wokół Meghaduty. Nieprzerwana nić literackiej kultury sanskrytu*, edited by Lidia Sudyka, Teresa Miążek, and Mariola Pigoniowa, 35–40. Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka.

Cieślikowski, Sławomir. 2017. *Teoria literatury w dawnych Indiach*. Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka.

FitzGerald, Edward, transl. 2009. *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Edited by Daniel Karlin. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Machalski, Franciszek. 1969. 'Poetycka sława Omara Chajjama'. In *Omar Chajjam. Rubajaty*, edited by Jan Reychman, 5–20. Wrocław: Ossolineum.

Lal, Ananda. 2004. *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Mangrulker, Aravind. 1981. 'A Handful of Flowers'. In *Umarashatakam: A Sanskrit Version of the Rubaiyats of Omar Khayyam*, 5–11. Pune: Madhumalati Suru.

Muley, R.M. 2015. 'Contribution of N.G. Suru to Sanskrit Studies'. In *Contribution of Maharashtra to Sanskrit Language and Literature*, edited by B.K. Dalai, 655–656. Pune: SP Pune University.

Narayana Das, Adibhatla, transl. 1937. *Rubaiyat of Omar Khaiyam with English Translation by Edward FitzGerald, Translated into Sanskrit and Dēsyāndhram*. Mazagon, Bombay: The British India Press.

Olivelle, Patrick. 2009. *Pañcatantra: The Book of India's Folk Wisdom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Parthasarathi, B.N.V. 2022. 'Versatile genius Adibhatla Narayana Das'. *Hindu Post*, 24 August 2022. Accessed 19 February 2025. https://hindupost.in/history/versatile-genius-adibhatla-narayana-das/.

Seyed-Gohrab, Ali-Asghar. 2012. 'Khayyām's Universal Appeal: Man, Wine, and the Hereafter in the Quatrains'. In *The Great Umar Khayyam: A Global Reception of the Rubaiyats*, edited by Ali-Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, 11–38. Leiden: Leiden University Press, Project MUSE.

Suru, Narahari Govind, transl. 1981. *Umarashatakam: A Sanskrit Version of the Rubaiyats of Omar Khayyam.* Pune: Madhumalati Suru.

Szczepanik, Lidia. 2014. 'Sanskryckie poematy *dūtakāvya*. Rys historyczny gatunku'. In *Wokół Meghaduty. Nieprzerwana nić literackiej kultury sanskrytu*, edited by Lidia Sudyka, Mariola Pigoń, and Teresa Miążek, 17–33. Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka.

Truschke, Audrey. 2016. *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Venuti, Lawrence. 1995. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London: Routledge.

FOLIA ORIENTALIA—BIBLIOTHECA 2 (2025)
DOI 10.24425/for.2025.156883

Vance Schaefer
The University of Mississippi, USA | schaefer@olemiss.edu

Tamara Warhol
The University of Mississippi, USA | twarhol@olemiss.edu

Technicolor Thai Translations versus Monochromatic English Translations of Japanese TV Dialogues

Abstract Speakers possess a linguistic repertoire of various codes (languages) and speech styles such as regional dialects, registers of (in)formality, and sociolects indexing gender, sexuality, neurodivergence, and more. Speakers alternate among these styles to express multiple identities, shifting relationships, and changing stances (i.e., speaker's attitude toward a topic, message). Japanese entertainment media masterfully deploys Japanese speech styles and their associated linguistic features (e.g., pronouns, verb forms) to develop storylines. However, these indexical features are largely lost in English-translated subtitles, resulting in one-dimensional characters, flatter interactions, and storylines with less depth while erasing the voices of marginalized groups (e.g., regional, LGBTQIA+) and perpetuating images of a monolithic Japan. The current study investigates the degree of erasure of Japanese speech styles in Thai translations of several TV shows. English appears to act as a pivot language in streaming platforms such as Netflix whereby Japanese is translated into English and then, into a third language like Thai, reflecting English translation/linguistic constraints. Yet, direct Japanese-to-Thai translations appear to allow for more accurate representation of these shared indexical features (e.g., multiple first- and second-pronouns, verb forms) and their associated speech styles and thereby, create richer characters, interactions, and stories.

Keywords communicative repertoire, speech styles, translation, Japanese, Thai, English, pivot language, Netflix, audiovisual translation

1 Introduction

Globalization and technology have allowed for greater media representation of ethnic and linguistic diversity breaking the Anglo-American stranglehold on worldwide media production. Japanese culture continues to appeal to large audiences around the world with its movies, TV shows, anime, manga, videogames, and music groups, promoting the Japanese language and culture. The Japanese-language series *Shogun* became in 2024 the first non-English-language TV show to win a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Drama Series and awards in another 17 categories. The popularity of Japanese culture drives steady foreign language enrolments in Japanese

© 2025 The Author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

language courses in English-speaking nations, despite drops in other foreign languages (cf. Japan Foundation 2023).

Yet, Japanese media may still be viewed through the lens of Anglo-American colonialism before being streamed worldwide. American streaming platforms decide what programs to show viewers. More importantly, translations of subtitles or dubbed dialogue into third languages often go through (American) English, leaving fingerprints of the (American) English language or culture, diluting the original language and culture. This phenomenon needs to be examined as 70% of global viewership on Netflix, for example, is done through subtitles or dubbed dialogues (Netflix 2024).

This study examines the Thai translations of speech styles in three Japanese Netflix programs, focusing on the translation of multiple first- and second-person pronouns, address terms, (im)polite verb forms, and sentence-final particles (SFPs) in Japanese. The study compares the Thai translations against both the Japanese original dialogue and English translations through documenting the linguistic features and interpreting their indexical associations and effects. Results suggest that Thai subtitles are likely mediated by English-language translations of subtitles and dubbed dialogue.

2 Communicative repertoire of speech styles

Language speakers possess a linguistic or communicative repertoire of codes (i.e., languages) and/or speech styles (i.e., variations in one language) such as (im)politeness registers, regional dialects, and sociolects (i.e., social dialects) of gender, generation, LGBTQIA+ sexuality, and other social groups. These various speech styles may vary linguistically by phonology, lexicon, syntax, pragmatics, discourse style, orthography, paralinguistics, and other linguistic domains. For example, Japanese features multiple first-person pronouns, second-person pronouns, address terms, (im)polite verb forms, sentence-final particles, and other features. The usage of a particular speech style and its associated linguistic features may index identity, define relationships, designate status, shape situations, express stance, and more (Eckert 2019; Hanks 1996).

Additionally, given linguistic dynamism, no discrete linguistic speech styles really exist as speakers shift among speech styles, mix styles, or insert elements of one speech style into the mainframe speech style (cf. codeswitching, codemixing, codeborrowing). Both metaphorical and situational switching among speech styles index multiple, fluid, evolving identities, relationships, and stances. Thus, the use of a particular speech style and shifting among speech styles (i.e., styleshifting) bear pragmatic consequences.

Entertainment media deploys speech styles and their features to create recognizable character identities, reflect or construct relationships, describe or shape situations, reveal stances (i.e., what the speaker thinks about what is being said), and more. Shifting among speech styles (i.e., styleshifting) activates the social associations of these speech styles to demonstrate fluid identities, evolving relationships, developing situations, changing stances, and other effects. Indeed, entertainment media manipulates these speech styles and styleshifting to drive the storyline of TV shows,

movies, books, and other media. Moreover, it should be noted that there are exaggerated speech styles used in media, specifically anime, to depict particular, recognizable characters, i.e., 'role language' *yakuwarigo* or 'character language' *kyarago* (Kinsui and Yamakido 2015), cf. pirate voices or villain voices in US media. *Yakuwarigo* may be used in any language for pragmatic reasons in the sense that speakers may consciously project or hide particular identities, converge/diverge with their interlocutors, express humor, and more (e.g., Kansai dialect, LGBTQIA+ sociolects, etc.).

Yet, linguistic differences between languages such as a lack of counterpart features (e.g., multiple first- and second-person pronouns) compounded by subtitling conventions (e.g., subtitle length, timing) can constrain translation, requiring different strategies to create the same effects. The alternative of somehow not translating these linguistic features and thereby, their associated speech styles, is that translated subtitles and dubbed dialogues may result in erasure which may 'render some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible' (Irvine and Gal 2000: 38).

By contrast, linguistic similarities between languages can allow more faithful translations, resulting in similar pragmatic effects. For example, sharing multiple first- and second-person pronouns as Japanese and Thai do, unlike English, can promote more faithful translations. However, the advantage of sharing linguistic features can be potentially erased if translation between typologically similar languages is mediated by a third language which is typologically different. Indeed, this seems to be the case where original dialogue in Japanese TV shows may be mediated through English as a pivot language by human translators or by AI translations, relying on large language models primarily trained on immense English-language datasets. That is, translations into Thai from the original Japanese, if mediated through English, will likely result in less-than-faithful translations as they do not or cannot exploit shared linguistic features between Thai and Japanese to express various speech styles.

3 Comparison of Japanese, Thai, and English features for various speech styles

3.1 Japanese speech styles and features

The linguistic repertoire of Japanese speakers may consist of active and receptive codes (languages) and speech styles such as regional dialects (cf. standard Japanese), (im)politeness registers (e.g., honorific language), and sociolects of gender, LGBTQIA+ sexuality, socioeconomic status, and more. Speakers read the room (i.e., situation) or read the air (i.e., *kūki o yomu*),[1] as said in Japanese. Speakers may shift among these speech styles in response to social cues. For example, speakers may use speech styles in response to the (in)formality of the situation, to express one's stance (i.e., what a speaker thinks about what is being said), and other factors. Styleshifting

1 A modified Hepburn transcription is used throughout this article.

in Japanese is also triggered by common Japanese social behavior such as inside versus outside groups (*uchi-soto*), social hierarchy (*jōge kankei*), private versus public face/thoughts (*honne-tatemae*), and more. These cues naturally interact to activate styleshifting.

In Japanese these speech styles can be highly codified and differ in linguistic form as seen in Table 1. One well known speech style in Japanese is honorific language (*keigo*). This speech style is commonly divided into respectful language (*sonkeigo*), polite language (*teineigo*), and humble language (*kenjōgo*) using both suppletive forms (i.e., completely different root or word) and inflected forms (i.e., same root adding different grammatical or pragmatic morphemes). For example, when referring to a listener's actions, a speaker may use *meshiagarimasu* 'eat' or *o-tsukuri ni narimasu* 'make' to show respect (*sonkeigo*) while using *itadakimasu* 'eat' or *o-tsukuri shimasu* 'make' to refer humbly to one's own actions (*kenjōgo*). Furthermore, a speaker may use polite language (*teineigo*) to show politeness, social distance, lack of intimacy, and more (cf. Hasegawa 2015) by using *tabemasu* 'eat' or *tsukurimasu* 'make' for both the listener and themself. These registers would also include casual styles where the speaker would use *taberu* 'eat' or *tsukuru* 'make' for the listener and themself or even coarse, male forms where the speaker would use *kū* 'eat' for the listener or themself. There are also many other forms (e.g., *-(r)are* morpheme to show respect: *suru* to *sareru* 'do'). Additionally, these speech styles are fluid in that a speaker might mix and match them, that is to say shift among them, within one conversation or interaction depending on the cultural cues. For example, a speaker may say the humble form of 'eat' *itadaku* to express politeness while not appending the *-mas-* polite morpheme in order to express intimacy; such usage may also demonstrate sophistication as a type of beautified speech (*bikago*), stereotypically associated to older, female speakers when speaking among their friends, but perhaps used among other groups such as gay men.

Suppletive form	Inflected form	Speech style
meshiagarimasu	*o-tsukuri-ni narimasu*	respect (*sonkeigo*)
itadakimasu	*o-tsukuri itashimasu*	humble (*kenjōgo*)
tabemasu	*tsukurimasu*	polite (*teineigo)*
taberu	*tsukuru*	informal
kuu	–	coarse, male

Table 1. Suppletive and inflected linguistic forms varying by Japanese speech styles (cf. Hasegawa 2015)

Speakers must make conscious decisions about using particular speech styles and their associated linguistic forms shaped by context for horizontal honorifics (i.e.,

polite -*mas*- verb forms versus informal plain verb forms) and by relationship, status, and other factors for rank-based vertical honorifics (e.g., respect speech styles). Indeed, using the plain style may be a conscious decision as the polite -*mas*- form may be the default as noted by a reviewer; however, the reverse might be plausible given that children are socialized into using the polite -*mas*- form upon entering school as the plain form is generally used at home among family and friends and as inner dialogue. Regardless, speakers must make conscious decisions in using particular speech styles and their associated linguistic forms informed by their personal language ideology.

In addition to verbs and their forms, pronouns or other address terms are another area where speech styles can be manipulated for effect. Pronouns in particular are associated to particular genders, age, and other characteristics while being wielded in different situations just as the verb forms are. As seen in Table 2, a speaker might use several words for 'I' such as these multiple Japanese first-person pronouns (and their generalized nuances): *watakushi* (super formal), *watashi* (polite), *boku* (casual, male), *atashi* (casual, female), *ore* (coarse, male), *washi* (older male, somewhat rustic), and more. Also, speakers may use many words for 'you' such as *anata* (public, polite in some cases), *kimi* (casual, male), *omae* (coarse, male), *kisama* (aggressive, male), *anta* (casual, dialect), and more, including not overtly using any second-person pronoun which might be indicated by context, verb forms (e.g., respect forms), and more. Address terms including first and family names can be used as second-person

First-person pronouns	Approximate level of formality, nuance	Second-person pronouns	Approximate level of formality, nuance
title, term of address	Depends on term, context, etc.	title, term of address	Depends on term, context, etc.
watakushi	super formal	*anata*	formal, public (e.g., surveys)
watashi	polite	*kimi*	casual, used by males to address both genders
atashi	casual, female	*omae*	coarse, used by males to address both genders
boku	casual, male	*jibun*	casual, dialect
ore	coarse, male	*anta*	casual, dialect
washi	older male	*temee*	coarse, aggressive
jibun	casual, male	*kisama*	coarse, aggressive

Table 2. Sample of first- and second-person pronouns varying by Japanese speech styles (cf. Hasegawa 2015)

pronouns, oftentimes adding the morpheme *-san* or *-sama* to the term for politeness: teacher (*sensei*), customer (*o-kyaku-sama*), middle-aged man/uncle (*ojisan*), young man/older brother/older male (*onīsan*), police officer (*o-mawari-san*), upper classmate *(sempai*), family name (e.g., *Tanaka-san*), and more.

Many of these terms are context-dependent. For example, a younger sibling may call their older brother *onīsan* as would younger people to older males who are relatively young while older people may call a young adult male by the same term. Also, men may use the coarse second-person pronoun *omae* in many ways: a male superior may address a subordinate at the workplace to show some familiarity; males may use this pronoun with people close to them; male strangers may use this pronoun to show condescension or 'fighting words'. There is an interplay of many context-dependent factors that determine usage and their interpretation.

Japanese also features a rich repertoire of sentence-final particles. These particles function to show questions, emphasis, pragmatic meaning, and more and may also express stance among many other functions (Hasegawa 2015) as shown in Table 3. These sentence-final particles are generally avoided in formal speech where speakers, particularly those of lower social status, tend to avoid showing stance, i.e., emotions.

Form	Approximate description of a possible function
ne	seeking agreement among many meanings
yo	emphasis
wa	emphasis (if high pitch in standard Japanese, female/marking hyperfemininity, oftentimes combined with *ne*, *yo* as in *wa ne*, *wa yo*); emphasis (if low pitch in Kansai dialect, gender neutral)
ze	emphasis (male, standard Japanese)
zo	emphasis (male, standard Japanese)
no	question (casual)

Table 3. Sample of sentence-final particles and their approximate usages and meaning in Japanese (cf. Hasegawa 2015)

Another speech style potentially present in a Japanese speaker's communicative repertoire is regional dialect. Speakers may switch to regional dialects or mix regional dialect elements into standard Japanese in informal and other situations (e.g., Yamaguchi dialect, Okamoto 2008). Regional dialects may vary by linguistic features as exemplified in the second-most commonly spoken dialect after standard Japanese centered on Tokyo: the Kansai dialect spoken in Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe, and Nara in the historical, cultural center of Japan. Standard Japanese and the Kansai dialect can vary linguistically as seen in Table 4.

Standard Japanese	Kansai dialect	English meaning
*tabe**nai***	*tabe**hen***	not eat (casual form)
da	*ya*	casual form of the be-copular
arigatō	ōkini	Thank you
arigatō low + high + low + low + low pitch	*arigatō* low + low + low + high + low pitch	Thank you
*iku **yo***	*iku **wa*** (low pitch on *wa*)	I'm going!

Table 4. Sample of differences between standard Japanese and the Kansai dialect

Additionally, many sociolects are commonly used in Japanese. Gendered sociolects are seemingly common in Japanese, but tend to be more highly exaggerated in entertainment media. For example, as seen in Table 3 sentence-final particles can be gendered: *iku wa* (female) versus *iku zo* (male, gender neutral) '(hey) I will go!' (emphasis). There are other tendencies such as morphemes: *o-sushi* (beautified speech) versus *sushi* (common, casual); grammar: *suki yo* (female) versus *suki da* yo (male, gender neutral); pronunciation (e.g., pitch), and more. Other sociolects may include those associated to various communities: LGBTQIA+, neurodivergent, etc. These sociolects may overlap with other sociolects and vary by gender, generation, formality, regional dialect, and more. Furthermore, Japanese speech styles can vary by genre, (e.g., academic, literary, specific field-related) which may exploit the triple lexical layer of native Japanese words, Sinitic-based words, and Western (primarily English) words with their respective nuanced meaning, e.g., *tatemono, kenzōbutsu, biru(dingu)* 'building'; *hataraku, shigoto (o) suru, (aru)baito (o) suru* 'to work' although *baito* from German 'Arbeit' means 'part-time, casual work' in Japanese.

Together, these linguistic features in the potential speech styles of a Japanese speaker's communicative repertoire are manipulated as part of the pragmatics of interacting with other speakers. Shifting among different linguistic forms associated to varying speech styles requires highly proficient linguistic competence (i.e., knowledge of linguistic forms) and communicative competence (i.e., knowledge of pragmatics of when and how to use these forms) to navigate interactions. Wielding these speech styles with great fluidity can define both the speaker's and listener's identities, relationships, stances, contexts, and more.

Additionally, we might categorize language usage by lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic levels as summarized in Table 5. That is, speakers may select specific lexicon or grammatical structures associated to particular speech styles. Or lexicon and grammatical structures may differ in their pragmatic value as shaped by context, thereby being associated to particular speech styles. For example, polite *-mas-* verb

Linguistic domain	Japanese	English	Thai
Lexical	Multiple first-person and second-person singular pronouns.	Address terms (e.g., *sir*, *ma'am*), including derogatory terms, used with second-person pronouns.	Multiple first-person and second-person singular pronouns.
Grammatical	Multiple verbs by formality.	Formal verbs: to consume, ingest, partake, dine, etc. (to eat), to terminate (to end), to commence (to start), to purchase (to buy), etc.	Multiple verbs by formality.
Pragmatic	*-mas-* polite verb forms versus plain style verb forms.	*Your highness*, *sir*, *ma'am*, etc. used in polite situations as well as sarcastic situations.	*Khrap* (male) and *khâ* with falling tone (female statement)/ *khá* with high tone (female question).

Table 5. Schematic comparison of lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic differences among languages

form usage among female friends can be interpreted according to context as projecting gentility or sophistication, formality if speaking in a discussion in a classroom, or a more distant stance among many possible interpretations. Table 5 provides a schematic comparison of Japanese by lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic differences with potential analogous counterparts in English and Thai, where possible. Such a schematic categorization provides an analytical framework to demonstrate with concrete examples the possible gaps between monochromatic versus technicolor translations.

3.2 Thai speech styles and features

Thai also features a range of speech styles indexed by various linguistic features. Thai verbs may differ by register as seen in Table 6. for the word 'eat'. We see suppletive forms rather than inflected forms as Thai is an analytic language generally lacking in inflectional morphology. Additionally, these forms are not necessarily available for all verbs as is the same case for Japanese suppletive forms for a limited number of verbs.

Thai also possesses a wide range of first- and second-pronouns. First-person pronouns reflect speech styles from higher to lower formality intersecting with other indexical features such as gender, regional dialect, etc. at times as seen in Table 7.

Thai also may use address terms for first-, second-, and third-person singular pronouns. *Phî* 'older sibling' for 'older person'. *Lung* 'uncle (older brother of parent)' for 'middle-aged man'. *Bpâa* 'aunt (older sister of parent)' for 'middle-aged woman'.

Form	Speech style
kin[2]	common
ráp bpràthaan (thaan)	formal, polite
bɔɔriphôok	‘consume’ formal
dὲεk	vulgar, used with close friends
yát	vulgar
chǎn	used for monks
sàwǝ̌əi	royal
màm	used with babies or young children
cîa	used by Chinese-Thai

Table 6. Possible words for ‘eat’ in Thai varying by speech style (Diller 1985: 61–62; informed by casual discussion by researchers with native Thai speakers)

First-person pronouns	Approximate level of formality, nuance	Second-person pronouns	Approximate level of formality, nuance
khâaphacâw	ultra formal, male/female	*thân*	super polite, male/female
kraphǒm	super formal, male	*khun*	polite, male/female
phǒm	polite, male	*thəə*	casual, male/female
dǐchán	casual, female	*naay*	casual, male/female
chǎn	casual, male/female	*raw*	casual, male/female
raw	casual, male/female	*mʉng*	coarse, male/female
kháw, tua eeŋ	very casual, female	*tua, tua eeŋ*	very casual, female
kuu	coarse, male/female		

Table 7. Sample of first- and second-person pronouns in Thai varying by speech style (Iwasaki and Ingkhaphirom 2005: 50–51)

[2] Transcriptions use a modified international phonetic transcription (IPA) phonetic transcription (cf. Iwasaki and Ingkhaphirom 2005). Diacritics indicate tones: ◌ mid, ◌̀ low, ◌̂ falling, ◌́ high, ◌̌ rising

In addition, Thai uses sentence-final particles. Sentence-final particles often convey questions, emphasis, and pragmatic meanings such as softening utterances, conveying friendliness, asking for agreement, and more as seen in Table 8.

Form	Approximate possible function
khráp (statement, question)	politeness marker (male)
khâ (statement) khá (question)	politeness marker (female)
nà	express insistence, request acceptance
cá	friendly, casual versions of *khâ,* khá; generally used by female speakers
ná	makes utterance softer, gentler; seeking agreement
sí	shows emphasis

Table 8. Sample of sentence-final particles and their approximate usages and meaning in Thai (Iwasaki and Ingkhaphirom 2005)

Lastly, as seen in some of the language samples above, Thai features regional dialects and sociolects, including spoken versus written forms.

3.3 American English speech styles and features

English also features various speech styles but in ways that differ from Japanese and Thai. Verbs may vary by speech style where English might exploit the lexical strata of native English words and those from Latin, Greek, and French. For example, English uses phrases such as *Please refrain from using your phone* versus *Don't use your phone*. For 'eat' English speakers might use many of the following: *consume*, *dine*, *chow down*, *dig in*, and more; these may not only indicate formality but also other nuanced meanings. English may also use other parts of speech (e.g., adverbs) to create phrases that apply to others out of politeness or aggression that are somewhat analogous to Japanese respect versus humble verb forms. For instance, English has *Could you **kindly** provide me with information* but generally not *I will **kindly** provide you with information*, or *what **the eff** are you doing.*

English pronouns are much more limited than those in Japanese and Thai. First-person singular pronouns are mostly limited to *I* although there is the royal *we* or *me* or *myself* in dialect as in *me thinks something is odd*. Second-person pronouns are a little richer. While modern English has lost the older distinction between informal *thou* and formal *you* that remains in many European languages, the archaic casual form pops up in historical dramas, for example. The plural second-person pronoun features variation as in the Southern American English or

African-American English *y'all* (seemingly spreading among young English speakers around the world) or *youse* or *you guys* or *yinz* and more. English, however, has a large range of address terms. In Southern American English using *sir* or *ma'am* along with *Mr* or *Miss* attached to first names is common as a form of politeness or gentility as in *Mr. Bob* or *Miss Karen* while in General American these are not used and/or carry different pragmatics, e.g., *ma'am* may cause some women to feel that they are being called old. People may be called by their job titles as in *doc/doctor*, *professor*, *officer*, etc. and by endearments such as *honey*, *sweetie*, *kiddo*, etc. These are not second-person pronouns, but they have some functions similar to pronouns, e.g., pragmatic meaning showing stance as in *this biyatch* (i.e., *I*) *is gonna hit you* or *you mother effer are one crazy dude*.

English does feature some types of sentence-final particles. For example, Canadian English speakers attach *eh* to sentences to confirm information, show agreement, and many more meanings. Many English varieties also attach *you know*, *right*, *see*, *like*, *no*, *though*, *man*, and more to either the end or beginning of sentences for various meanings in a similar manner to sentence-final particles in Thai.

English features a wide range of regional dialects and sociolects as well. These may differ by the presence or absence of particular lexicon, differences in meaning of shared words, or in the frequency or usage of particular lexicon. Australian English tends to prefer to use *heaps* for American English *lots*, but both words are mutually understood, and Australian English speakers bandy about the *c-word* to refer to one's friends or enemies, whether male or female, with much greater frequency to the shock of many American English speakers although American English speakers may use the word *bitch* in the same way. Moreover, these dialects and sociolects may vary by accent, grammar, pragmatics, paralinguistics, and more.

These linguistic features associated to various speech styles in Japanese, Thai, and English are used as deductive categories in analyzing the data in our study and are not exhaustive.

4 Current study

4.1 Research questions

The current exploratory study seeks to answer the following questions:

- Do Thai subtitles appear to be translated from the English-translated subtitles or from the original Japanese dialogue?
- Could Thai subtitles be potentially more faithfully translated from the original Japanese dialogue by using shared linguistic features?

These two research questions are informed by the following secondary objectives:

- To describe and interpret the linguistic forms and functions of Japanese speech styles in the original Japanese dialogues, focusing on multiple first- and second-person pronouns, (in)formal verb forms, and sentence-final particles (SFPs).

- To observe and interpret the linguistic forms and functions of the English and Thai translated dialogues, i.e., subtitles, dubbed dialogues, as compared to the targeted Japanese speech styles in the original Japanese dialogues.
- To compare the English- and Thai-translated dialogues of the original Japanese dialogues to determine the possible effect of English-mediated translations on Thai translations from the Japanese.

4.2 Materials

The following three Netflix shows were examined:

4.2.1 *Rurouni Kenshin: The Beginning* (2021)

This show is based on the manga of the same name. The story revolves around the protagonist, Himura Kenshin, an assassin, caught up in the struggle between pro- and anti-(Shogun) government factions during the Bakumatsu period (1860s) before the rise of modern Japan.

4.2.2 *The Door into Summer* (2021)

Although this movie is based on the book of the same name by the American author, Ray Bradbury, it is produced in Japanese. This science fiction show tells the story of an inventor of robotic technology whose work is stolen by his business partner and girlfriend and who is then put into cryogenic sleep for 30 years. Once he wakes up he is assisted by an android to change the past by returning to 1995.

4.2.3 *What Did You Eat Yesterday?* Episodes 1–2 (2019)

This TV series is based on the *yaoi* (i.e., boys' love) manga comic. The story depicts the daily life of a middle-aged gay couple. They work as a lawyer and hairdresser who enjoy cooking and eating food.

4.3 Analysis

The current study focuses on the Thai translations (e.g., subtitles, dubbed dialogues) of the original Japanese dialogue and compares them to the Japanese original and English subtitles previously analyzed in another study (Schaefer and Warhol forthcoming). We analyze the Thai translations considering both linguistic constraints and translation constraints.

First, as part of linguistic constraints, we examine the translated subtitles and dubbed dialogues by functional equivalence, acceptability, and readability (Pedersen 2017). That is, we answer the following questions:

(1) *Functional equivalence*: Do the subtitles convey speaker meaning?
(2) *Acceptability*: Do the subtitles sound correct and natural in the target language (i.e., domestication versus foreignization)?
(3) *Readability*: Can the subtitles be read in a fluent and non-intrusive way?

Second, as part of translation constraints, we consider the subtitle guidelines for English employed by streaming platforms like Netflix and their possible impact on translation. For example, Netflix advocates up to 20 characters per second (cps) or 240 words per minute (wpm) for adult programs (Netflix n.d.). Guidelines further advise two lines with 42 characters maximum per line. When examining the translation of dubbed dialogues, analysis also considers lipsyncing. Translated dialogue must match mouth movement both in the length and lip movement (e.g., closed lips for /m/, /p/, or /b/) of the original dialogue and some paralinguistic features such as body movement, gestures, facial expressions, visuals, and more and thereby, influencing translation.

Third, our analysis also takes into account the influence of English as a pivot language: Japanese original to English pivot translation to Thai translation. That is, we attempt to determine what linguistic and translation constraints of English impact the Thai translations as compared to the original Japanese dialogue. Additionally, we surmise there would be traces of English whether translations are done by human translators or Large Language Models (LLMs), i.e., artificial intelligence, which are trained on English as a medium and thereby, resulting in translations being mediated through English between languages, e.g., Japanese to English to Thai rather than directly from Japanese to Thai. However, we do not expect to be able to easily differentiate between human and AI translations but note in either case the possible impact of English.

Lastly, our analysis of the Thai translations references initial observations of the Japanese-to-English translations in the same three shows (Schaefer and Warhol forthcoming). The current article extends analysis to the Thai translations as compared to both the original Japanese dialogue and English translated dialogue as possibly mediated by translations through English as a pivot language.

The previous study (Schaefer and Warhol forthcoming) analyzed the English translations of original Japanese dialogues and arrived at the following observations:

- Show one: *Rurouni Kenshin: The Beginning* (2021)
  1. Japanese regional dialects (e.g., standard, Kansai, Western Japan) are used for the be-copula to indicate different factions: standard for the government factions (e.g., *da*), Kansai for the Kyoto locals (e.g., *ya*), and Western Japanese for the rebel forces (e.g., *ja*). This technique allows the characters, dialogue, and thereby, the storyline to be easily followed.
  2. Spoken accents (e.g., trilled /r/, gravelly voice) and sentence-final particles may indicate stance (e.g., aggression, politeness) and questions, emphasis, agreement, and more, respectively, where English translated subtitles may rely on punctuation, font (e.g., bold, italics), grammatical structure, etc. although at times accents and sentence-final particles seem to be difficult to render into English.

- Show two: *The Door into Summer* (2021)
  3. Hierarchical relationships are indicated by multiple pronouns, (im)polite verbs, and other linguistic features.

4. Humor may be created by flouting the socially-expected usage of particular pronouns, address terms, and other linguistic features that indicate one speech style when another is expected in the given social situation.
5. Japanese multiple pronouns used in a relationship may change over time to indicate growing intimacy between speakers, e.g., from *omae* (male, coarse, condescending) to *kimi* (male, friendly) both meaning 'you'.

- Show three: *What Did You Eat Yesterday?* Episodes 1–2 *(*2019)

6. The gay couple use hyper-masculine versus 'boyish' language as exemplified in the first-person male pronouns of *ore* and *boku*, respectively. Such language usage depicts a hierarchical relationship stereotypical of male-female relationships. This portrayal may reflect the writer's worldview as a straight female or her desired depiction writing *yaoi* (boys' love) manga targeting a straight female audience although such relationships may exist in reality among gay men and in the end are after all fictional relationships depicted in media.
7. Native speakers of Japanese may interpret some of the gay couple's dialogue as occurring between an older and younger person such as between a father and child or between a male speaker and female speaker.
8. Gay terms (e.g., *bottom*, *top*, *bear*) are mainstreamed but tend not be understood by non-LGBTQIA+ viewers of the original Japanese while mostly understood by English-speaking viewers of the English translations. The nuanced difference between *gei* 'gay' versus *dōseiaisha* 'homosexual' appear to differ in Japanese as compared to English and is lost in the English translation. That is, *dōseiaisha* 'homosexual' seems to carry a politeness given its more academic nuance (i.e., Chinese-based word similar to Latin-based words in English) while in English it seems to be somewhat outdated in non-clinical conversations and thereby, seems to carry negative, biased connotations toward gay men.
9. Speakers shift between highly linguistically marked speech styles using various pronouns, (im)polite verbs, sentence-final particles, and more to show identities, relationships, and/or stances (i.e., what the speaker thinks about what it is being said). For example, the mother of one of the gay men mother uses 'motherese,' i.e., speech style used stereotypically by mothers to their children while her son shifts to polite Japanese when he feels exasperated by his mother's behavior, e.g., badgering her son to come out as a gay man in his law office.

5 Results: Thai translations of original Japanese dialects

5.1 Regional variations of the be-copula

We now document Thai translations of the original Japanese dialogues as compared to the English translations.

We note the translation of the be-copula in *Rurouni Kenshin: The Beginning* (2021). In the original Japanese dialogue, regional variations of the be-copula reflect the

affiliation of various factions as seen in Table 9. By contrast, both English and Thai translations use one form of the be-copula that does not show any regional variation in the two respective languages. However, there are cases where translations of the be-copula in Japanese were rendered into English and Thai without using a be-copula.

Be-copula form in Japanese	Speech style	English translations	Thai translations
da	Modern standard dialect form = Tokyo (or Edo government)	be-verb: am, are, is	*bpen* (be-copula)
ja	Western Japanese dialect from Satsuma and Chōshū = rebel forces	be-verb: am, are, is	*bpen* (be-copula)
ya	Kansai dialect = local speakers in Kyoto	be-verb: am, are, is	*bpen* (be-copula)

Table 9. be-copula regional forms in *Rurouni Kenshin: The Beginning* (2021)

5.2 Register variations in pronouns, address terms, and verb forms

We describe the translation of register differences in pronouns, address terms, and verb forms in *The Door into Summer* (2021). In the original Japanese dialogue in Table 10, the human protagonist uses the coarse male second-person pronoun *omae* in his initial encounters with the human android. He also uses casual verb forms. In comparison, the android employs respectful linguistic forms commonly used by service industry workers toward the human protagonist. As such, when the human android styleshifts into very casual, male Tokyo dialect while speaking to himself, the stark contrast in speech styles creates a humorous moment.

By contrast, the English translation and Thai translation do not juxtapose coarse and polite speech styles to create the condescending versus respectful interaction between the two characters and the ensuing humorous moment. The English uses ‘I’ and ‘you’ for the coarse, first- and second-person pronouns of *ore* and *omae*, respectively. The Thai translation uses *phǒm* and *khun* which are both polite forms for ‘I’ and ‘you’, respectively. However, Thai could have used coarse male language such as *kuu* for ‘I’ and *mʉng* for ‘you’ to create a similar interaction as the Japanese original dialogue. However, the English translation for the super polite service industry term *kashikomarimashita* ‘understand’ as ‘acknowledged’ renders the response as formal or even how a computer AI is expected to respond in English while the Thai translation using *sâap* which is politer than the more common *rúu* ‘to know’ along with the polite male sentence final particle (SFP) *khráp* makes the utterance polite in Thai. Moreover, the *mendokusē* in Japanese is male, coarse language associated with Tokyo speakers. The English translation may not be as impactful but still shows impoliteness by its

meaning while the Thai translation is impolite due to its meaning and dispensing with the socially-expected polite male sentence-final particle *khráp*.

Speaker	Japanese original dialogue	English translation	Thai translation
Human protagonist (Takakura)	俺は退院する	I'm leaving.	ผมจะไป
	Ore wa taiin suru		*Phǒm cà bpai.*
	1MS-(coarse) = TOP leave + hospital + do-NPS		1MS-POL will go
Human protagonist (Takakura)	ヒューマノイドなんだろ？これは命令だ	You're a humanoid robot, right? This is a command.	คุณเป็นหุ่นยนต์มนุษย์ใช่ไหม นี่คือคำสั่ง
	Hyūmanoido nan daro? *Kore wa meirei da.*		*Khun bpen hùnyonmanút châi mái? Nî khʉʉ khamsàng*
	Humanoid explanatory/emphasis morpheme COP. CJT-CAS. This = TOP command-COP-CAS		2NS-POL COP android right SFP-Q. This COP command
Human android (PETE)	かしこまりました 担当のもちづきをお呼びいたします	Acknowledged. I'll go get the person in charge.	รับทราบครับ ผมจะไปตามผู้รับผิดชอบ
	Kashikomari-mashi-ta *Tantō no Mochizuki o o-yobi itashimasu.*		*Ráp sâap khráp* *phǒm cà bpai dtaam phûu ráppìtchɔ̂ɔp*
	'understand'(HUM)-POL-PST In-charge = GEN Mochizuki (family name) = OBJ BEA-call (verb stem) do-(HUM)-POL-PST		Receive knowledge SFP-POL-MAS 1MS-POL will go follow person.take.responsibility
Human android (PETE)	めんどくせえ	What a pain.	วุ่นวายจริงๆ
	Mendokus-ē		*Wûnwaai jiŋjiŋ*
	Annoying-MAS (Tokyo dialect)		Annoying really (duplicative for intensity) lack of a SFP-POL-MAS

Table 10. Casual versus formal forms in *The Door into Summer* (2021)[3]

3 Transcriptions of dialogue adopt a modified form of the Leipzig Glossing Rules (Comrie, Haspelmath, and Bickel 2015) as informed by Zisk (2023) for Japanese in Tables 10–13 and any full-sentence examples. Phonetic transcriptions use a modified Hepburn system rather than the International Phonetic Alphabet given the Hepburn system is fairly transparent and commonly used.

In another interaction the human protagonist's coarse casual language is pointed out by the android as being rude. The English subtitle translates *omae* as 'you'. In turn, the Thai translation uses *khun* which is a polite form of 'you' in Thai when a coarse, male second-person pronoun *mʉng* could have been used to relay the impact of the Japanese original *omae*. The result of such a similar translation of pronouns is that both the English and Thai translations show a disconnect in discourse meaning.

Speaker	Japanese original dialogue	English translation	Thai translation
Human protagonist (Takakura)	お前何やってんの？	What are you doing here?	คุณมาทำอะไรตรงนี้เนีย
	omae nani yatte n no		*Khun maa tham àrai dtrong nı́i nîa*
	2MS-AHO what do-NPS-CAS (reduced form) STP-Q-CAS		2NS-POL come do what right here SFP (contraction of *nîi* + *ná* = just discovered fact + seeking a response)
Human android (PETE)	初対面で' お前' は失礼です	Please be more courteous.	กรุณาสุภาพกว่านี้ด้วยครับ
	Hatsutaimen = de 'omae' wa shitsurei desu		*Kàrúnaa sùphâap kwàa ni dûay khráp*
	First.meeting = LOC 2MS-AHO = TOP rude COP.POL-NPS		Please polite more this also SFP-POL-MAS

Table 11. Coarse second-person pronoun in Japanese and its English and Thai translations

In one more interaction this unequal relationship between the human protagonist and human android plays out humorously through styleshifting by the android going from a respectful style to a casual, if not rude, style as seen in Table 12. In the Japanese original the human android attaches -*sama* which is an even more respectful morpheme than -*san* to the human protagonist's name. When asked by the human protagonist to dispense with such respectful language, the human android uses the human protagonist's last name only which is considered rude in Japanese in this context as their relationship is not one of friendly male camaraderie (cf. military) similar to calling a stranger by their last name in American English. In this case, the English translation manipulates English address terms of 'sir' versus 'dude' to create a similar humorous effect. By comparison, the Thai translation juxtaposes the polite

second-person pronoun *thân* against the casual second-person pronoun *phûak* with its apparently slang meaning of 'dude' in Thai as well as the polite sentence particle *khráp* with the casual, somewhat insistent *sì*.

Speaker	Japanese original dialogue	English translation	Thai translation
Human android (PETE)	お待ち下さい　高倉様	One moment, sir.	รอก่อนครับ ท่าน
	o-machi kudasai Takakura-sama		*Rɔɔ kɔ̀ɔn khráp thân*
	BEA-wait please Takakura (family name)-RSP		Wait first SFP-POL-MAS 2NS-RSP
Human protagonist (Takakura)	あと　その' 高倉様' ってやめろよ	Don't call me sir.	อย่ามาเรียก 'ท่าน' นะ
	ato sono 'Takakura-sama' tte yamero yo		*Yàa maa rîak 'thân' ná*
	also that Takakura (family name)-RSP CMP stop-IMP ASR		Do not come (=all this time; persistently) call 2NS-RSP SFP (softener)
Human android (PETE)	お待ち下さい　高倉	One moment, dude.	รอก่อนสิ พวก
	o-machi kudasai Takakura		*rɔɔ kɔ̀ɔn sì phûak*
	BEA-wait please Takakura (family name)		Wait first SFP-EMP 'dude'

Table 12. Polite address morpheme in Japanese and its translation

In an interaction where the two main characters part ways as seen in Table 13, the human protagonist styleshifts from the coarse second-person pronoun used by males of *omae* he has been using throughout their relationship to the familiar second-person pronoun used by males of *kimi: kimi ga ite kurete yokatta* [Somewhat literally: (That) you are (here) was good.] This could be interpreted as a shift in the human protagonist's attitude toward the human android: from a condescending attitude toward a machine to one of a friendship toward a sentient being.

Contrary to the Japanese original, English translates the dialogue by restructuring the Japanese in a way needing the plural first-person pronoun rather than the second-person pronoun in the original: *I'm glad **we** met.* The Thai translation mirrors this English structure although Thai could somewhat mirror the original Japanese dialogue in its use of the second-person pronoun, e.g., *I am glad I met **you**.* Additionally, Thai uses the polite first-person pronoun *phǒm* which is a departure from the

protagonist's normal use of the coarse, male first-person pronoun *ore*. This change in first-person pronouns by the human protagonist in Thai could possibly be interpreted as a shift in his relationship toward the human android.

Speaker	Japanese original dialogue	English translation	Thai translation
Human protagonist (Takakura)	君がいてくれてよかった	I'm glad we met	ผมดีใจนะที่เราได้เจอกัน
	kimi ga ite kurete yokatta		*Phǒm dii cai ná thî raw dtâi jəə kan*
	2MS-CAS = NOM exist-SEQ good PST		1MS-POL good heart SFP (softener) subordinating conjunction marker we can meet together

Table 13. Usage of casual second-person pronoun by human protagonist to address android robot

The analysis of the Thai translations concerning pronouns used by the human protagonist and human android appear to be directly translated from English translated subtitles rather than from the original Japanese dialogue. This interpretation is suggested by the existence of the rich repertoire of Thai first-person and second-person pronouns that could be used to mirror the manipulation of pronouns in the Japanese original dialogue to define the relationship between the human protagonist and human android in a similar manner.

5.3 Hypermasculinity, hierarchy, heteronormativity, and gay terms

Next, the relationship between the gay couple in *What Did You Eat Yesterday?* (2019) feels reflective of a stereotypical heteronormative relationship as one male spouse uses hypermasculine language while the other uses boyish, almost feminine speech patterns. For example, the hypermasculine spouse uses the coarser language forms of *omae*, *meshi*, *umai*, and more while the more boyish, somewhat effeminate spouse (as reinforced by body language, pitch, voice quality) uses more boyish, neutral, or polite forms such as *boku*, *gohan*, *oishii*, and more as noted in Table 14.

By contrast, English and Thai translations do not reflect the differences in the identities of the two men and thereby, their relationship in Thai and English appears more egalitarian. Again, Thai could exploit Japanese linguistic counterparts with its multiple first- and second-person pronouns and (im)polite verbs to recreate a similar hierarchical, stereotypical heteronormative relationship.

Masculine partner	Neutral/boyish/somewhat effeminate partner	English translation	Thai translation
俺*ore*	ぼく*boku*	I	ฉัน chăn
メシ*meshi*	ご飯*gohan*	– (*gohan o taberu*, *meshi kuu* translated as 'eat' only)	ข้าว khâao
食う*kuu*	食べる*taberu*	eat	กิน kin
うまい*umai*	おいしい*oishii*	(tastes) good	อร่อย *àrɔ̀i*

Table 14. Language usage differences between the gay middle-aged couple in *What Did You Eat Yesterday*? (2019) and their translated English, Thai counterparts

Heteronormativity and gay terms are mainstreamed. Gay relationships have stereotypically heteronormative male-female roles imposed upon them using terms such as *onna-yaku* 'female role', *tachi-neko* 'masculine-acting bottom' as seen in Table 15. Additionally, some terms such as *nonke* 'straight' in Japanese may not be well known by non-LGBTQIA+ viewers while the English counterpart 'straight' is likely well known by non-LGBTQIA+ viewers. On the other hand, the Thai translations seem to be more literal descriptions (e.g., *fàai ráp* 'receiving role') or somewhat off (e.g., *hùn mìi* 'teddy bear).

Japanese gay term	English translation	Thai translation
女役*onnayaku* 'woman role'	the woman in the relationship	บทฝ่ายหญิง *bòt.fàai yǐng* role female 'female role'
タチネコ*tachi-neko* 'masculine-acting bottom'	–	–
ネコ*neko* 'bottom'	bottom	ฝ่ายรับ *fàai ráp* group receive 'receiving side/faction'
ヒゲクマ系*hige-kuma-kei* 'facial hair-bear'	bear	หุ่นหมี *hùn mìi* puppet bear 'teddy bear'
ノンケ*nonke* 'straight'	straight	ชอบผู้หญิง *chɔ̂ɔp phûuyǐng* like women
カミングアウトしてる*kaminguauto* shiteru 'coming out do progressive form'	You've come out.	ว่าลูกเป็นเกย์ *wâa lûuk bpen kee* say child COP gay '(you) say you are gay'

Japanese gay term	English translation	Thai translation
ゲイ *gei* 'gay'	gay	เกย์ *kee* gay
同性愛者*dōseiaisha* 'homosexual'	gay	เกย์ *kee* gay
ぼくのほうが男なんですよ。*Boku no hō ga otoko na n desu yo.* 1MS-CAS = GEN part/ side = NOM man explanatory/ emphasis morpheme COP.POL-NPS ASR	I'm more of a man than he is.	ผมน่ะรับบทฝ่ายชาย *phǒm nà ráp bòt.fàai chaai* 1MS-POL particle (emphasizes topic, i.e., I) receive role male '**I** play the role male'

Table 15. Gay terms and their Netflix translations

6 Discussion/conclusion

Our interpretations of the Thai translations of the original Japanese dialogue present several themes.

On the micro-level, we note that linguistic features associated with different Japanese speech styles (e.g., regional dialects, sociolects, etc.) are generally not translated into English or Thai. For example, both Thai and English do not feature a be-copula varying by regional dialect, and so, do not translate these regional differences directly (e.g., no regional forms of the be-copula) or indirectly (e.g., using other regional linguistic features). English has more dissimilar linguistic features with Japanese in contrast with Thai which shares some similar linguistic features (e.g., multiple first- and second-pronouns). However, the Thai translations do not exploit the rich repertoire of pronouns in Thai to indicate hierarchical interactions, evolving relationships, changing stances, and more. The Thai translation generally uses the polite forms of *phǒm* and *khun* rather than the coarse forms of *kuu* or *mʉng* to reflect 'I' and 'you', losing the social and pragmatic information encoded in the usage of the coarse first-person and second-person pronouns of *ore* and *omae* used to reflect 'I' and 'you' in Japanese, respectively. Given the possibility of a more nuanced translation from Thai into Japanese, the lack of coarse language seems to suggest that the Thai subtitles are being translated from the English 'I' and 'you'. As such, the Thai translations do not exploit linguistic similarities with Japanese to evoke the same effects. On the macro-level the result is that characters may seem more one-dimensional; dialogues are more difficult to follow along; interactions are flatter; and the storyline is poorer in nuances. The overall effect is that the story is less colorful (i.e., monochromatic) compared to the technicolor Japanese original, despite the potential in Thai to reproduce a more technicolor version.

Not all dialogues lack nuance, however. In cases where English can translate the nuance of particular address terms associated to a particular speech style, the Thai attempts to do as well (e.g., the translation of deleting *-sama* as 'dude' in English or *phûak* in Thai in a polite relationship for a humorous effect caused by the use of a socially unexpected linguistic form). There is some attempt to render polite verb forms into similar counterparts in English and thereby, into Thai: Japanese super polite service industry language such as *kashikomarimashita* as 'acknowledged' and then, polite *ráp sâap khráp* 'understand (instructions)' in Thai. Yet, these instances are limited given the typological differences in how Japanese and English speech styles are encoded linguistically.

Additionally, we note that even if regional variation of the be-copula existed in English or Thai, and were applied to the English and Thai translations, or if other regional linguistic forms were applied, they would not activate the social associations of the original Japanese. These English or Thai linguistic forms would likely activate culture-specific associated regional stereotypes and thereby, likely create a dissonance with the original Japanese culture, e.g., Western Japanese dialects translated into Southern American English. Nevertheless, it should be noted that regional dialects are rendered in a standard form like General American (GA) which could be considered a dialect that may be associated to middle-class, cisgender, heteronormative speakers with other possible additional social associations and thereby, in essence is not a neutral variety.

As for sociolects, the hierarchical relationship and hypermasculine, effeminate, and/or boyish identities seem to be erased in the English translations. The Thai translations also seem to erase the hierarchical relationship and identities despite the Thai repertoire of multiple first- and second-person pronouns and (im)polite verb forms. Again, this seems to indicate that the Thai translations are mediated by the English translations rather than being direct translations of the Japanese original dialogue. Interestingly, the English translates most of the terms used in the gay community while the Thai seems to consist of descriptions rather than jargon.

In sum, as noted on the micro level, Thai translations seem not to fully employ the linguistic repertoire of available pronouns, verb forms, sentence-final particles, and other linguistic features including pronunciation (not discussed in the results) and regional dialectal features. Instead, there is a tendency to translate Japanese speech styles into Thai through the medium of standard (American) middle-class English (GA). Thus, Thai seems to mirror English translations by mostly employing standard Thai used in the capital of Bangkok. This tendency results in lower linguistic and social information: Identities (regional, social, gender), relationships, situations, stances, and more are generally erased in translated subtitles which in turn results in marginalized groups among both Japanese and international viewers being erased. Moreover, this monochromatic representation of various speech styles means that styleshifting and its pragmatic meaning are also erased.

On the macro level, translated Thai dialogue does not fully take advantage of its available repertoire of linguistic features, resulting in a less effective depiction of the multiple, fluid identities, description of evolving relationships,

expression of changing stances, and more, impacting the story background and development of the story. There are less colorful characters, flatter interactions and relationships, and difficult-to-follow dialogues and storylines due to these linguistic and translation constraints compounded by using English as a pivot language. Furthermore, Japan may be portrayed as a monolithic society as representation of various communities is diluted or completely erased through the non-translation of their speech styles.

In response, we recommend direct translations from Japanese into Thai so that they are representative of various social groups. Nevertheless, we do realize that there may be fewer translators available as compared to Japanese into English or Thai into English, but advocate team translations (e.g., Japanese-English and Thai-English translators) or at least utilizing a Japanese language consultant to inform the English-Thai translator(s) about the original Japanese dialogue. To resolve translation constraints, we recommend possibly using telops, i.e., texts or images such as captions, subtitles, scrolling tickers, etc. superimposed on the screen (e.g., commentary floating across the screen as in the beginning of Star Wars movies). That is, commentary might be added to the screen in some capacity.

Lastly, we note that the question remains if translation could ever replicate the similar social connotations associated to particular speech styles from one language to another. For example, translating a Japanese regional dialect into Southern-American English in a Japanese-to-English translation and then, into a Northeast (Isaan) Thai regional dialect ignores the long, social history of these dialects on both sides of the translation divide and creates a confusing dissonance among viewers by tying the stereotypical social associations of a particular speech style in English or Thai to Japanese characters or contexts.

Although we used deductive analysis based on the languages' grammar, broadly defined, our approach has limitations. First, we have no firsthand knowledge of Netflix's translation process. We neither observed translation nor dubbing in the process or interviewed translators and dubbers. We acknowledge also that the objective of translations may be localized translations, i.e., domestication and not foreignization, of commercial products geared toward domestic consumers. Second, although we attempted to use an objective template for analysis, our subjective interpretations may have influenced our observations, particularly those related to macrolevel concerns such as how colorful the translation is. Nevertheless, the careful analysis of the microlevel grammatical features of the Thai translations demonstrates that they are not taking advantage of the rich communicative repertoire of speech styles available in Thai. The result is translations with low-level information rather than robust character and scene depictions.

Other limitations concern the scope of the current study which serves as multiple case studies rather than a virtual ethnography or a large corpus analysis. As a next step to gain more information to interpret the translations, we recommend these follow-up tasks to this current study. We suggest testing native speakers on their interpretation of subtitles and dubbed dialogue in the original Japanese, translated

English, and translated Thai dialogues. We also recommend having Japanese-Thai bilinguals do direct translations from Japanese into Thai to compare with the seemingly English-mediated Japanese-to(-English-to)-Thai translations.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Vance Schaefer http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4801-7114

Tamara Warhol http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1955-5909

Abbreviations

1MS	first person masculine singular	HUM	humble
2MS	second person masculine singular	IMP	imperative
		MAS	masculine
2NS	second person neuter singular	NPS	nonpast
AHO	anti-honorific	OBJ	object
ASR	assertive	POL	polite
BEA	beautificatory	PST	past
CAS	casual	RSP	respectful
CJT	conjectural	SEQ	sequential
CMP	complementizer	SFP-Q	sentence-final particle, question
COP	copula	TOP	topic

References

Adachi, Naoko, writer. 2019. *What Did You Eat Yesterday*. Season 1, episodes 1–2, ‘Episode 1/Episode 2’. Directed by Katsumi Nojiri, Kenji Katagiri, and Kana Matsumoto. Featuring Hidetoshi Nishijima and Seiyō Uchino. Released September 2023 on Netflix (U.S.). https://www.netflix.com.

Comrie, Bernard, Martin Haspelmath, and Balthasar Bickel. 2015. *The Leipzig Glossing Rules: Conventions for Interlinear Morpheme-by-Morpheme Glosses.* Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology.

Diller, Anthony V.N. 1985. ‘High and Low Thai: Views from Within’. In *Papers in South-East Asian Linguistics No. 9: Language Policy, Language Planning and Sociolinguistics in South-East Asia*, edited by David Bradley, 51–76. Canberra: Australian National University.

The Door into Summer. Directed by Takahiro Miki. 2021; Tokyo, Japan: Toho Aniplex.

Eckert, Penelope. 2019. ‘The Limits of Meaning: Social Indexicality, Variation, and the Cline of Interiority’. *Language* 95 (4): 751–776.

Hanks, William. 1996. ‘Language Form and Communicative Practices’. In *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity*, edited by John J. Gumperz and Stephen C. Levinson, 232–270. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hasegawa, Yoko. 2015. *Japanese: A Linguistic Introduction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Irvine, Judith T., and Susan Gal. 2000. 'Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation'. In *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Polities, and Identities*, edited by Paul V. Kroskrity, 35–84. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.

Iwasaki, Shoichi, and Preeya Ingkhaphirom. 2005. *A Reference Grammar of Thai.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kinsui, Satoshi, and Hiroko Yamakido. 2015. 'Role Language and Character Language'. *Acta Linguistica Asiatica* 5 (2): 29–41.

Kroskrity, Paul V. 2010. 'Language Ideology – Evolving Perspectives'. In *Society and Language*, edited by Jürgen Jaspers, Jan-Ola Östman, and Jef Verschueren, 192–211. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/hoph.7.13kro.

Netflix. n.d. 'English (USA) Timed Text Style Guide'. Accessed October 8, 2025. https://partnerhelp.netflixstudios.com/hc/en-us/articles/217350977-English-USA-Timed-Text-Style-Guide.

Netflix. 2024. 'Netflix Showcases New and Returning International Series and Films'. 19 November 2024. https://about.netflix.com/en/news/netflix-showcases-new-and-returning-international-series-and-films.

Okamoto, Shigeko. 2008. 'Speech Style and the Use of Regional (Yamaguchi) and Standard Japanese in Conversations'. In *Style Shifting in Japanese*, edited by Kimberly Jones and Tsuyoshi Ono, 229–250. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.180.00spe.

Pedersen, Jan. 2017. 'The FAR Model: Assessing Quality in Interlingual Subtitling'. *The Journal of Specialised Translation* 28: 210–229.

Rurouni Kenshin: The Beginning. Directed by Keishi Ōtomo. 2021; Tokyo, Japan: Warner Bros. Pictures Japan. Netflix.

Schaefer, Vance, and Tamara Warhol. Forthcoming. 'Subtitling and Dubbing out Diversity: Expressing (Evolving) Identities, Relationships, and Stances in Japanese through Translating Underrepresented Linguistic Repertoires and Codeswitching/Styleshifting'. In *Multiculturalism, Literature and Translation in East Asia*, edited by Tzu-yu Lin. London: Routledge.

Zisk, Matthew. 2023. 'Classical and Modern Japanese Glossing Rules (2023.08.20)'. https://www.academia.edu/92091743/Classical_and_Modern_Japanese_Glossing_Rules_2023_08_20.