

PHILOLOGY AND THE DIALOGUE OF CULTURES

The Sanskritist Sheldon Pollack describes philology as “the discipline of making sense of texts” [2, p. 398]. Philology is carried out in the service of understanding texts: you learn the language, its history, and the culture around it to make a better and more profound sense of the text. As people learn and use languages, they build social identities, cultural practices, and a sense of belonging as they learn and use languages.

Language is not just a communication tool—it helps connect with people from different cultures and understand each other better. There is no denying how deeply language and culture are tied. Language does not just come from culture; it also carries culture within it. The words we use and how we speak all reflect our society's beliefs, traditions, and values.

The “Dialogue of Cultures” is about communication, mutual understanding, and recognizing that every culture has its valid perspective. It helps to understand how people adapt to new cultural environments and how cultural traditions blend and shape one another.

Since language grows out of culture and carries cultural meaning, translators cannot just translate words – they must also translate the cultural context. Cultural Intelligence Theory, introduced by Yoesoep Edhie Rachmad in 2022, focuses on the ability of individuals to interact effectively in diverse cultural contexts. The theory defines cultural intelligence as understanding and adapting to different cultural contexts. It is based on the phenomenon that many individuals and organizations face challenges when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds [3, p. 1].

Muamaroh maintained that “translation is the process of transferring not only the message but also the style and the culture from the source language to

target one” [1, p. 3].

Ultimately, translators do not just deal with language barriers – often, the bigger challenge comes from cultural differences rather than linguistic ones. When translators fail to recognize cultural differences, they risk producing false or misleading translations, which not only confuses but can also offend or create diplomatic blunders.

For example, Arabic is loaded with culture-specific terms and expressions that have no equivalents in English. Likewise, the Arabic term “مميّتلا” /attayamumu/ has a symbolic religious meaning that is unknown in the English culture. It refers to dry ablution using dust when there is no water for prayer ablution [1, p. 5].

Translation is finding a middle ground – it is not just copying word for word or completely rewriting something new. The main job is to make sure the reader gets the same picture and enjoyment from the text as someone reading it in the original language would. Translators face numerous dilemmas, such as whether they should preserve the foreignness of the original, even at the risk of sounding awkward or “stiff” in the target language. They must determine how to maintain coherence and stylistic unity, especially when the original language’s word roots and concepts do not align with the target language. Another challenge is balancing accuracy to the original with elegance in their own language [4, p. 8–10].

In conclusion, translation is not just about words – it is about understanding cultures; languages carry unique cultural meanings that cannot always be directly translated. Good translators must balance accuracy with readability while respecting cultural differences. Translation connects people across cultures. In our global world, this cultural awareness matters more than ever. The best translations do not just change languages – they build bridges between different ways of thinking.

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