



Translating Culture in Sa'di's *Gulistan*: Strategies and Orientation in Rehatsek's English Translation

Vida Pirmohamadlou* 

Corresponding Author, PhD Candidate in Translation Studies,
Department of English Translation Studies, Faculty of Persian
Literature and Foreign Languages, Allameh Tabataba'i
University, Tehran, Iran; vida_pirmohamadlou@atu.ac.ir

Abstract

Culture-specific terms and concepts (CSTCs) constitute the most intractable obstacle in the literary translation of classical Persian texts, because the items that anchor a work such as Sa'di's *Gulistan* in its thirteenth-century Persian-Islamic milieu are precisely those for which the receiving culture offers no ready counterparts. This study offers the first systematic, corpus-based investigation of how Edward Rehatsek's 1888 English translation, which shaped Western perceptions of the *Gulistan* for more than a century, coped with this obstacle. All CSTCs in Chapters 3 and 4 of the *Gulistan* and their renderings in Rehatsek's translation (n = 428) were identified, classified into an eleven-category cultural taxonomy, and mapped onto an eclectic framework of fifteen strategies synthesized from Newmark (1988) and Hervey and Higgins (2002). Equivalence (20.8%), couplet constructions (13.7%), communicative translation (13.5%), and explication (10.7%) were the most frequent strategies, while exoticism (2.0%), cultural borrowing (2.4%), and repetition (1.8%) were marginal. Classified by macro-orientation, 30.9% of strategy instances were source-oriented and 69.1% target-oriented, indicating that Rehatsek overwhelmingly domesticated the *Gulistan* for his Victorian readership. The findings are discussed in light of text type, readership constraints, and Venuti's (1995) critique of fluency in Anglo-American translation. The study contributes a replicable quantitative model for descriptive research on translating classical Persian literature and shows that the very readability that ensured Rehatsek's version survived entailed a measurable erosion of its cultural texture.

Keywords: Culture-specific terms, domestication, foreignization, *Gulistan*, Sa'di, translation strategies

Cite this article: Pirmohamadlou, V. (2026). Translating culture in Sa'di's *Gulistan*: Strategies and orientation in Rehatsek's English Translation. *Translation and Interpreting Research*, 3(10), 73-86.
<https://doi.org/10.22054/tir.2026.96191.1097>



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Print ISSN: 3092-6599

Online ISSN: 3060-7019

Publisher: Allameh Tabataba'i University Press

Published: 30.06.2026

Accepted: 21.06.2026

Received: 20.05.2026

1. Introduction

Translation between cultures separated by more than linguistic distance has always been a negotiation between two competing obligations: the obligation to render the source text intelligible to its new readers and the obligation to preserve what makes that text a product of a particular culture. Nowhere is this negotiation more delicate than in the translation of literature whose semantic and aesthetic force depends on dense deposits of culture-specific material. The terms culture-specific terms and concepts (CSTCs) — closely related to what Russian translation scholarship terms *realia* and to Aixelá's (1996) "culture-specific items" — designate those text items whose function and connotation are rooted in the source culture's history, religion, social organization, or material life, and which therefore "pose significant translational hurdles" because they routinely lack direct equivalents in the target culture (p. 56). As Zare-Behtash and Firoozkoobi (2010) observe, translating culture-specific items is "one of the most challenging tasks to be performed by a translator" in literary texts (p. 3).

The theoretical stakes of this challenge were raised decisively by Venuti (1995), whose history of Anglo-American translation argues that fluency, the erasure of linguistic and cultural alterity in favor of a smoothly readable target text, has been the dominant, and an ethnocentrically consequential, norm of English-language literary translation. On this account, every domesticating decision is not merely a stylistic preference but an act of cultural assimilation. The question of whether a given historical translation domesticated or foreignized its source is therefore not an antiquarian curiosity: it bears on how entire literary traditions were received, misread, and canonized in the Anglophone world.

Few works of world literature illustrate these questions more aptly than the *Gulistan* (*The Rose Garden*) of Sa'di of Shiraz (c. 1210–1291/2). Composed in 1258 CE, the *Gulistan* is perhaps the single most influential work of Persian prose: a hybrid of moral anecdotes, verse aphorisms, and mirroring-for-princes counsel, written in a prose style celebrated for its inimitable simplicity and saturated with Qur'anic allusions, Sufi terminology, courtly and dervish institutions, botanical and culinary *realia*, and proverbial idiom. Because its stories and maxims circulated through most of the Persianate world from the king to the peasant, and because the work became a standard primer for European learners of Persian from Sir William Jones onward, its English translations constitute a consequential site of cultural mediation.

One of the most historically significant of these renderings is Edward Rehatsek's *The Gulistan or Rose-Garden of Sa'di*, published anonymously in Benares in 1888 for the Kama Shashtra Society of Burton and Arbuthnot. Rehatsek (1819–1891), a Hungarian-born Orientalist who spent his mature career in Bombay, was among the most prolific Persian-English translators of the nineteenth century; his *Gulistan* was long regarded as one of the reliable translations and remains in print. Despite its historical significance, however, the translation's treatment of the culture-specific elements of Sa'di's work appears to have received limited systematic attention, particularly regarding how these elements were rendered for a Victorian readership likely to find them culturally unfamiliar.

This study addresses that lacuna through a complete corpus analysis of two chapters of the *Gulistan*. Chapters 3 ("On the Excellence of Contentment," 29 stories) and 4 ("On the Advantages of Silence," 14 stories) were selected because they had not previously been scrutinized for their cultural load and because, together, they offer a dense and varied sample of the work's cultural texture while keeping the dataset manageable. Three research questions guide the study:

1. Which translation strategies are used to render culture-specific terms and concepts in Edward Rehatsek's English translation of Sa'di's *Gulistan*?
2. How does the distribution of translation strategies vary across cultural categories, and what patterns emerge in the treatment of different types of culture-specific material?

3. To what extent does the overall distribution of translation strategies indicate a predominantly domesticating or foreignizing orientation in Rehatsek's translation?

2. Literature Review

The scholarly treatment of culture-bound material in translation has developed along two complementary lines: a procedurally oriented line concerned with how translators handle individual items, and an orientation-oriented line concerned with where the cumulative effect of those decisions places the translation on the source–target continuum.

The procedural line begins with Newmark (1988), whose *A Textbook of Translation*, remains the most widely invoked taxonomy in empirical studies of cultural translation. Newmark defined culture as “the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression,” and he classified cultural words into five categories: ecology; material culture (artefacts, food, clothes, houses and towns, transport); social culture (work and leisure); organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts; and gestures and habits (p. 94). His translation procedures for such items — transference, naturalization, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent, descriptive equivalent, couplets, notes, and so on — have furnished the operational vocabulary for countless descriptive studies.

Hervey and Higgins's (2002) *Thinking Translation* series contributes a distinct and, in some respects, complementary set of categories. Their chapter on “cultural transposition” arranges procedures along a continuum of target-culture bias: at the most foreignizing end lies exoticism (importing foreignness wholesale), followed by calque (literal transfer of an expression's form), cultural borrowing (direct carriage of the source word into the target text), and communicative translation, with cultural transplantation — replacing the source-culture item wholesale with a target-culture one — at the most domesticating extreme (Shuttleworth, 1997). Because Newmark's taxonomy is richest in reader-directed procedures (equivalents, explication, footnotes) and Hervey and Higgins's in source-preserving and effect-preserving ones, the two models interlock well; their synthesis is the basis of the present study's framework.

On the conceptual side, Aixelá (1996) reframed the problem by treating culture-specific items not as fixed textual objects but as dynamic relations: an item is culture-specific only relative to a given receiving system, and its degree of cultural specificity is subject to manipulation by the translator. This insight licenses the aggregate, corpus-level measurement of orientation undertaken here: if each rendering of a CSTC is a positioning act, then the distribution of positioning acts across a whole text constitutes a measurable translation policy. Venuti (1995) supplies the critical vocabulary for interpreting such policies. Inspecting the original Routledge edition, one finds his argument that fluency has prevailed over other strategies to shape the canon of foreign literatures in English, and that the “domesticating method” effects “an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values”, a reduction with consequences for how whole literatures are received (p. 18). Venuti's history covers precisely the period in which Rehatsek wrote, and his account of the Victorian translation market — private scholarly subscriptions, commercial restraint, the expectation of immediate intelligibility — provides the sociological backdrop against which Rehatsek's choices must be read.

Research on Persian literature in English translation has also begun to gain momentum. Zare-Behtash and Firoozkoobi (2010) examined the challenges posed by culture-specific items in literary translation more broadly, drawing on Newmark's framework and Venuti's distinction between translator visibility and invisibility. Other studies have focused on English translations of Sa'di's *Gulistan* and *Bustan*, investigating the translation of religious terminology and personal names, as well as stylistic

differences among translators. The translation of culture-specific items (CSIs) within Sa'di's *Gulistan* has remained a vital focus of Translation Studies, with recent research providing deeper insight into how culture-specific items are mediated across time and methodology. Afrouz (2023) compared 19th-century renderings by Ross (1823) and Arnold (1899), demonstrating that the temporal span between translations did not necessarily reduce the reliance on low-productive strategies when handling complex cultural markers related to religion and social life. Building upon this comparative approach, Asgari Vartooni and Afrouz (2025) applied Davies's (2003) framework to evaluate the translations of Anderson (1861) and Rosenbaum (2010), concluding that substitution, literal translation, and generalization remain the dominant mechanisms for navigating culturally embedded references. Beyond historical comparisons, scholarly inquiry has also examined the influence of the translator's profile. Niami and Rouhi (2021) investigated the strategies applied by both native and non-native translators, exploring the nexus between the translator's background and the resulting CSI transfer in Sa'di's work. Furthermore, the dialogue has expanded to include the impact of emerging technologies; Arjmandpour and Bahri (2026) have recently initiated a critical comparison between human performance and AI-driven renditions of culture-oriented concepts within *Gulistan* anecdotes. Collectively, these studies emphasize the ongoing relevance of systematic CSI analysis, reinforcing the necessity for the present research to contribute a comprehensive examination of Rehatsek's (1888) specific macro-orientation. However, the culture-specific content of Chapters 3 and 4 has received limited systematic, quantitative examination, and the combined application of Newmark's and Hervey and Higgins's taxonomies to this text appears to remain underexplored. The present study addresses these potential gaps by conducting a quantified analysis of the translation and integrating the two taxonomies into a single analytical framework, drawing exclusively on empirical evidence from the translated text.

Neither Newmark's (1988) nor Hervey and Higgins's (2002) model, taken alone, captures the full range of solutions observable in a nineteenth-century literary translation of the *Gulistan*. Newmark offers a finely differentiated set of reader-oriented procedures, including functional and cultural equivalents, descriptive equivalents, explication, and notes, but gives less attention to the systematic classification of foreignizing options. Hervey and Higgins provide a more detailed account of cultural transposition, encompassing exoticism, calque, cultural borrowing, transplantation, and communicative translation, but offer fewer procedures for handling explanatory apparatus. Accordingly, the present study adopts an eclectic, researcher-operationalized taxonomy that brings together relevant categories from both models and supplements them with additional analytical categories where necessary to accommodate the range of translation solutions identified in the corpus. The resulting taxonomy comprises fifteen strategies. Although the categories draw on the two theoretical frameworks, their definitions and application are operationalized for the purposes of the present study to support the systematic identification and classification of culture-specific items in the translation. The fifteen strategies are defined as follows:

1. Exoticism (Hervey & Higgins): replacing the culture-specific item with a word or phrase from the source language, retaining maximal foreign flavor.
2. Cultural borrowing (Hervey & Higgins): carrying the source-language word directly into the target text, typically in Romanized form, as the target term.
3. Calque (Hervey & Higgins): a word-for-word or morpheme-by-morpheme literal transfer of an expression from one language into the other.
4. Repetition: repeating the item exactly as it appears in the source text.
5. Couplet (triplet, quadruplet) (Newmark): combining two, three, or four different strategies for a single item — most commonly a transliteration or loan in the running text reinforced by an explanatory footnote.

6. Explanations as footnotes (Newmark): adding an explanatory note at the bottom of the page to supply the cultural knowledge the target reader lacks.
7. (Functional/cultural) equivalent (Newmark): using a target-language term that performs the same function or carries the same cultural value as the source item.
8. Neutralization: paraphrasing the item with a generic, culture-free expression, thereby omitting its cultural specificity.
9. Descriptive equivalent (Newmark): describing the meaning or function of the cultural word in a phrase.
10. Explication: making explicit in the target text what the source text leaves implicit — expanding or clarifying the item's sense.
11. Synonymy: using a near-synonym in the target language.
12. Omission: leaving the cultural item out of the target text entirely.
13. Naturalization (Newmark): adapting the source-language word's form (spelling, phonology, morphology) to target-language norms.
14. Communicative translation (Hervey & Higgins, after Newmark's method): producing a rendering that has the same effect on the target reader as the source has on its readers.
15. Cultural transplantation (Hervey & Higgins): replacing the source-culture item with an item drawn wholesale from the target culture.

These fifteen strategies are not of equal theoretical weight: each carries an implicit orientation toward either the source or the target system. Following the classification adopted in the underlying study, five strategies are grouped as source-oriented (foreignizing): exoticism, cultural borrowing, calque, repetition, and couplet. Couplet is classified as source-oriented on the grounds that, in this corpus, couplets almost invariably incorporate a foreignizing base operation (a transliteration or calque) before any supplementary explanation, so that the foreign form remains present in the target text. The remaining ten strategies are grouped as target-oriented (domesticating): equivalence, neutralization, descriptive translation, explication, synonymy, omission, naturalization, communicative translation, cultural transplantation, and — with one qualification — explanations as footnotes. A footnote supplies target-culture readers with the interpretive means to consume the text without foreign mediation, and is thus classified as target-oriented in the aggregate accounting (the couplet already captures the foreignizing core of footnote-reinforced loans).

This binary classification makes the third research question operational. Because every one of the 428 culture-specific items in the corpus receives exactly one classified rendering (or a classified combination, in the case of couplets), the total strategy distribution can be partitioned into source- and target-oriented halves, yielding a single, verifiable index of the translation's macro-orientation. The index follows Aixelá's (1996) premise that each rendering of a culture-specific item is a positioning act, and it gives Venuti's (1995) domestication/foreignization distinction a quantifiable empirical form rather than leaving it at the level of impressionistic judgment.

3. Methodology

The study is a descriptive-qualitative case study with a quantitative accounting component, a design suited to research that seeks to describe existing translation behavior rather than to prescribe norms. The object of study is the pair formed by Sa'di's *Gulistan* and Edward Rehatsek's English rendering; the unit of analysis is the individual culture-specific term or concept and its target-text correspondent.

The corpus consists of two complete chapters of the *Gulistan* and their full translations. Chapter 3, “On the Excellence of Contentment,” comprises twenty-nine stories, and Chapter 4, “On the Advantages of Silence,” comprises fourteen. These two chapters were selected on three grounds. First, they had not been examined in prior work on the cultural content of the *Gulistan* in English, leaving a genuine descriptive gap. Second, they are dense with exactly the material that interests this study — moral anecdotes populated by caliphs, dervishes, physicians, merchants, and artisans, in which religious formulae, idiom, and material realia are inseparable from the narrative argument. Third, the *Gulistan* as a whole is too voluminous to permit the exhaustive item-by-item audit that a defensible frequency account requires; confining the study to two chapters guarantees completeness within a manageable frame. The target text is Rehatsek’s *The Gulistan or Rose-Garden of Sa’di*, first published in Benares in 1888; it is the earliest English rendering still in general circulation and was produced with the apparatus (prefaces, notes) characteristic of Victorian Orientalist translation.

To identify and classify the cultural material in the selected chapters, the study employs an eleven-category taxonomy developed eclectically from Newmark’s (1988) five cultural categories—ecology; material culture; social culture; organizations, customs, and ideas; and gestures and habits—and the twelve-category scheme used by Espindola and Vasconcellos, adapted to the Persian material under investigation. The resulting operational categories are (1) toponyms, (2) anthroponyms, (3) ecology, including flora, fauna, winds, and landscape, (4) food and drink, (5) clothes and houses, (6) idiom, (7) means of transport, (8) religious concepts, (9) measuring systems, (10) gestures and habits, and (11) work and leisure. An inclusive and explicit decision rule guided identification: any term or concept that could be assigned to one of these categories was treated as culture-specific and included in the corpus. Given the prevalence of proper names and proverbial expressions in the *Gulistan*, this procedure produced a corpus dominated by anthroponyms, idioms, and toponyms, alongside a substantial representation of religious and material-culture items.

The analysis proceeded in three stages:

Stage 1: Identification. The two source chapters were read line by line against Rehatsek’s translation, and every item satisfying the membership rule was isolated and recorded in a master inventory with its location, its category, its source-text form, and its target-text rendering. This stage yielded a total of 428 culture-specific terms and concepts.

Stage 2: Strategy mapping. Each source item was paired with its correspondent in the target text, and the operation actually performed by the translator was identified with reference to the fifteen-strategy taxonomy set out in Section 3. Where a single item was handled by more than one operation — as when a transliterated loan was supported by a footnote — the rendering was recorded as a couplet, with its component operations noted for the qualitative commentary and with each component counted in the strategy tallies. Where no correspondent could be located, the rendering was recorded as omission.

Stage 3: Quantification. Frequencies and percentages were computed both over the corpus as a whole and within each of the eleven cultural categories, and every strategy was then assigned to its macro-orientation class so that the aggregate source-oriented and target-oriented shares could be calculated. Percentages are reported to one decimal place; because figures are rounded, columns do not always sum to exactly 100%.

An important methodological distinction concerns the denominators used in the quantitative analysis. Because compound renderings were recorded component by component, the strategy tables represent strategy applications rather than individual CSTCs. The item census therefore comprises 428 CSTCs, whereas the strategy census comprises 496 applications. These totals serve different analytical purposes and must not be treated as interchangeable. For example, 103 instances of equivalence represent 24.1% of the 428 items but 20.8% of the 496 strategy applications. Accordingly, all

percentages in the overall strategy-distribution tables are calculated using 496 as the denominator, while the item total of 428 is used for the cultural-category census presented in Table 2. The difference between the two totals is 68, corresponding numerically to the number of couplet renderings. This correspondence is consistent with the treatment of couplets as renderings involving multiple operations; however, because the source dataset does not explicitly document this rationale, the relationship remains a reasonable inference rather than a confirmed feature of the original data.

Several additional inconsistencies in the source dataset warrant disclosure because they affect the interpretation of the category-level findings. Although the cultural-category census reported in Table 2 reconciles exactly to the overall total of 428 items, the strategy applications reported in the category-specific tables sum to 455 rather than 496. Furthermore, some category totals stated in the accompanying narrative—135 anthroponyms, 66 toponyms, and 107 idioms—differ from the figures in the category census and the corresponding strategy tables. Some category-level percentages are also calculated using denominators that do not correspond to the census total for the respective category. These discrepancies do not alter the overall strategy distribution, which is calculated using the reconciled total of 496 applications. Nevertheless, they limit the precision with which category-specific frequencies and percentages can be interpreted. Accordingly, the category-level percentages are reported as they appear in the source tables and are treated as indicative of relative patterns rather than as precise population parameters. The implications of these inconsistencies are considered further in upcoming sections.

To strengthen the transparency and replicability of the analysis, two additional safeguards were incorporated. First, classification decisions were guided by written definitions of all fifteen translation strategies, as presented in the theoretical framework, rather than by ad hoc judgments. These operational definitions provide a consistent basis for classification and make the coding procedure replicable in principle by another analyst working with the same corpus and definitions. Second, raw frequencies are reported alongside percentages throughout the results tables, enabling readers to recalculate the reported proportions and examine the numerical basis of the findings. This is particularly important given that a reported proportion such as 20.8% is based on 496 strategy applications and that relatively small differences in coding decisions could shift some percentages by one or two percentage points.

4. Results

The analysis yielded 428 CSTCs across the two selected chapters of the *Gulistan*, with 496 translation-strategy applications recorded in Rehatsek's English rendering. The results are presented in three tables. Table 1 summarizes the frequency and macro-orientation of the fifteen translation strategies, identifying the most and least frequently used procedures. Table 2 presents the distribution of CSTCs across the eleven cultural categories, showing which types of cultural material are most prominent in the corpus. Table 3 aggregates the strategy frequencies according to their source-oriented or target-oriented macro-orientation, providing an overall account of the translation's approach to cultural representation. Together, these results address the distribution of translation strategies, the composition of the cultural corpus, and the overall orientation of Rehatsek's translation.

Table 1. Frequency of Translation Strategies (N = 496 Strategy Applications)

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage	Macro-orientation
Equivalence	103	20.8%	Target-oriented
Couplet (triplet, quadruplet)	68	13.7%	Source-oriented
Communicative translation	67	13.5%	Target-oriented
Explication	53	10.7%	Target-oriented
Calque	34	6.8%	Source-oriented

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage	Macro-orientation
Cultural transplantation	33	6.6%	Target-oriented
Neutralization	28	5.6%	Target-oriented
Naturalization	21	4.2%	Target-oriented
Explanations as footnotes	20	4.0%	Target-oriented
Descriptive equivalent	18	3.6%	Target-oriented
Cultural borrowing	12	2.4%	Source-oriented
Exoticism	10	2.0%	Source-oriented
Synonymy	10	2.0%	Target-oriented
Omission	10	2.0%	Target-oriented
Repetition	9	1.8%	Source-oriented
Total	496	100%	153 source-oriented / 343 target-oriented

Four strategies account for well over half of all renderings. Equivalence is the single most frequent solution, applied in 103 instances (20.8%): in nearly a fifth of all cases Rehatsek reached for a target-language term that performs the same function as the Persian item and left it at that, without explanation or foreign form. Couplet constructions, renderings that combine two or more operations for a single item, came second with 68 instances (13.7%). Communicative translation accounts for 67 items (13.5%), and explication for 53 items (10.7%). Together, these four strategies account for 291 of the 496 strategy applications, or 58.7%.

At the other extreme, the most markedly foreignizing procedures were marginal. Exoticism was recorded 10 times (2.0%), cultural borrowing 12 times (2.4%), and repetition 9 times (1.8%). Omission, the total excision of a cultural item from the target text — occurred 10 times (2.0%), and synonymy likewise 10 times (2.0%). Even where Rehatsek preserved a foreign form, he did so almost always in combination with a domesticating operation (the couplet), rather than opting for the unglossed loan or transliteration that would have confronted the reader with an unmediated foreign text.

Table 2 reports the census of the eleven cultural categories to which the 428 CSTCs were assigned. The distribution is heavily skewed toward names and verbal formulae: anthroponyms and idioms together account for 203 of the 428 items, or 47.4% of the corpus, while the six least populated categories together account for only 94 items.

Table 2. Distribution of Culture-Specific Terms and Concepts by Cultural Category (N = 428)

Cultural category	Frequency	Share of corpus
Anthroponyms	112	26.2%
Idiom	91	21.3%
Toponyms	59	13.8%
Religious concepts	42	9.8%
Ecology	29	6.8%
Food and drink	28	6.5%
Work and leisure	25	5.8%
Clothes and houses	20	4.7%
Measuring systems	9	2.1%
Gestures and habits	7	1.6%
Means of transport	6	1.4%
Total	428	100%

Finally, Table 3 presents the aggregate orientation index that answers the third research question. Assigning each strategy to its macro-orientation class and summing across the corpus shows that

target-oriented strategies account for 343 of the 496 strategy applications (69.1%), against 153 source-oriented applications (30.9%). The ratio is approximately 2.24 to 1 in favor of domestication.

Table 3. Macro-Orientation of the Translation (N = 496 Strategy Applications)

Orientation	Strategies included	Applications	Share
Source-oriented (foreignizing)	Exoticism, cultural borrowing, calque, repetition, couplet	153	30.9%
Target-oriented (domesticating)	Equivalence, communicative translation, explication, cultural transplantation, neutralization, naturalization, footnotes, descriptive equivalent, synonymy, omission	343	69.1%
Total		496	100%

The picture that emerges is consistent across the three tables. The translation is not characterized by wholesale importation of Persian forms, nor by the obliteration of specific items, but by a systematic preference for renderings that dissolve the foreignness of the source into fluent target-language sense. Equivalence, communicative translation, and explication — the three reader-directed procedures that operate by finding, effecting, or explaining meaning rather than by preserving form — together account for 223 applications, or 45.0% of the total, while the two most robustly source-preserving procedures, exoticism and cultural borrowing, together account for only 22 applications, or 4.4%. The couplet, the most frequent nominally foreignizing strategy, is itself a hybrid that nearly always pairs a foreign form with a domestic explanation. Whatever the translator's stylistic intentions, the aggregate decision pattern points in a single direction, and the next section examines how that pattern was produced domain by domain.

5. Discussion

The aggregate result — 69.1% target-oriented against 30.9% source-oriented — is striking in its consistency, but an aggregate conceals the fact that the pressures operating on different cultural domains were not identical. This section examines the strategy profile of the four most heavily populated categories, then turns to the structural and institutional explanation for the overall pattern, and finally assesses what the pattern cost in terms of cultural transfer.

5.1. Anthroponyms: Naming, Naturalization, and the Pull of Familiarity

Anthroponyms form the largest single category in the corpus ($n = 112$, 26.2%). Names in the *Gulistan* are rarely neutral identifiers: they encode religious standing (the caliphs 'Umar and Hārūn al-Rashīd), the institutional world of the dervish and the court (wazirs, qāḍīs, ascetics), and, in the case of Sa'di's own anecdotes, the authority of personal testimony. The strategy profile for anthroponyms is the most distributed of any category in the corpus: couplets lead with 23 items (20.5%), followed by equivalence with 19 (16.9%), naturalization with 15 (13.4%), and communicative translation with 13 (11.6%); footnotes and explication each account for 9, and cultural borrowing, neutralization, transplantation, and repetition for 7 each. The prominence of naturalization (13.4%) reflects the fact that Rehatsek normally adapted Persian names to the phonological and typographic conventions of English — a modest but pervasive domesticating operation that ensures an Anglophone reader never stumbles over an unfamiliar sequence of consonants — while the couplet's leading position reflects the translator's habit of punctuating the narrative with a note where a name carried historical or doctrinal weight. The near-total absence of exoticism (4 items, 3.6%) in this category is telling: names were naturalized for readability and then, where necessary, explained, rather than presented in their Persian form.

5.2. Idioms: The Domain of Communicative Translation

Idioms constitute the second-largest category ($n = 91$, 21.3%), and their handling is the clearest single instance of Rehatsek's domestication at work. Communicative translation accounts for 26 renderings (28.5%), explication for 23 (25.2%), calque for 17 (18.69%), and couplets for 16 (17.6%); cultural transplantation accounts for 8 (8.8%), neutralization for 7 (7.7%), omission for 4 (4.4%), and equivalence for only 3 (3.3%). The dominant mechanism is thus not the transfer of the Persian idiom's image but the reproduction of its rhetorical effect. Persian proverbs in the *Gulistan* are densely metaphorical — built on regional fauna, folkloric archetypes, and the material life of the medieval bazaar — and a literal rendering of such an image would produce opacity rather than meaning. Rehatsek's response was to find an English expression that would do the same work the Persian expression does for a Persian reader, and where none existed, to spell the sense out. The consequence is that the moral point of each anecdote survives intact and legible while the image that carried it is dissolved: the reader follows the argument but never sees the camel, the moth, or the gardener's wall that made the argument vivid in Persian. It is the classic trade-off of the domesticating idiom translation, and Rehatsek accepts it almost without exception. The 18.69% calquing rate is the residual foreignizing trace — nearly one idiom in five retains a literal rendering — but even this group is heavily supplemented by the 17.6% of items handled through couplets, which typically gloss the calque so that it cannot function as an unmediated foreign form.

5.3. Religious Concepts: The Counter-current

If there is a domain in which Rehatsek's practice complicates the general picture, it is religious concepts ($n = 42$, 9.8%). Communicative translation leads here with 13 items (31%) — a notably higher share than in any other well-populated category — but the second most frequent strategy is the couplet, with 11 items (26.2%), followed by neutralization with 7 (16.6%), footnotes with 6 (14.3%), calque with 5 (11.9%), and explication with 4 (9.5%). The category thus exhibits the highest combined rate of footnoting and coupleting in the corpus: 17 of the 42 items (40.5%) received some form of explanatory apparatus. Qur'anic phrases, prophetic formulae of blessing, and doctrinal terminology cannot be rendered by a fluent English phrase without loss of referential precision, and Rehatsek evidently recognized that here the reader required instruction rather than fluency. The result is a genuinely bifocal practice: the religious registers of the *Gulistan* were explained to the Victorian reader even as the idiomatic and material registers were dissolved into it. That the same translator could calibrate his apparatus so finely by domain is itself evidence that the overall domesticating profile was a deliberate response to perceived reader need rather than an accident of linguistic ability.

5.4. Toponyms, Ecology, and Material Culture: Equivalence as Default

In the remaining high-frequency categories, equivalence is overwhelmingly the dominant operation, and the pattern suggests that Rehatsek treated physical and geographic reference as unproblematic. In toponyms ($n = 59$, 13.8%), equivalence accounts for 31 items (52.5%), with couplets at 6 (10.1%) and explication and cultural transplantation at 5 each (8.4%); exoticism accounts for only 3 (5.1%). In ecology ($n = 33$ in the category-level table), equivalence accounts for 19 items (65.5%) and couplets for 4 (13.8%). In food and drink ($n = 28$, 6.5%), equivalence accounts for 14 items (50%), descriptive equivalents for 5 (17.8%), and calque for 3 (10.7%). In work and leisure ($n = 25$, 5.8%), equivalence accounts for 12 items (48%), with explication, communicative translation, and transplantation at 4, 3, and 3 respectively. The general principle is that where a place, plant, animal, dish, or occupation had a recognizable English counterpart, that counterpart was used, and the differences between the Persian and the English referent were left unmarked. Flora and fauna are a useful illustration: an English tree name substitutes for the Persian tree name even where the botanical species differ, so

that the landscape of the *Gulistan* is quietly anglicized in the reader's imagination while the plot continues uninterrupted.

The categories handled by markedly different means are the least populated ones, and each seems to have been governed by a specific local problem. In clothes and houses ($n = 23$ in the category-level table), neutralization leads with 5 items (25%) and communicative translation follows with 4 (20%), with couplets, explication, and transplantation at 3 each (15%) — the profile of a translator confronted with garments and domestic spaces for which English possessed no counterpart and which therefore had to be described, generalized, or occasionally replaced. In measuring systems ($n = 9$), cultural borrowing is the leading strategy with 3 items (33.3%) and descriptive equivalents follow with 2 (22.2%): units of weight and distance were either carried over as foreign terms or explained, since neither substitution nor paraphrase could preserve their referential value. In gestures and habits ($n = 10$), the couplet leads with 3 items (42.8%), while cultural borrowing, neutralization, and transplantation account for 2 each (28.5%). The small size of these categories means their percentages should be read as indicative rather than precise, but the qualitative direction is clear: the more a domain resisted easy English substitution, the more the translator oscillated between carrying the foreign term over and explaining it away.

5.5. Text Type, Readership, and the Sociology of an Anonymous Translation

The second research question asked how text type and readership governed the strategies adopted. The evidence suggests that both operated as strong constraints, and that they interacted. As to text type, the *Gulistan* is didactic literary prose in which meaning is carried by short narrative units whose rhetorical function is to deliver a moral maxim; the reader's comprehension of the lesson is the text's *raison d'être*. A translation strategy that left the maxim opaque would defeat the genre, and this structural fact alone predicts a preference for effect-preserving and explanatory procedures over form-preserving ones. The corpus confirms the prediction: communicative translation, explication, and equivalence — the three procedures that prioritize sense delivery — account collectively for 52.1% of all renderings.

As to readership, the historical conditions under which Rehatsek's version appeared reinforced the same bias. The translation was published in 1888 by the Kama Shashtra Society, the private subscription venture founded by Richard Francis Burton and Foster Fitzgerald Arbuthnot, and it appeared anonymously — a circumstance that reflects a scholarly market in which translations circulated among private subscribers rather than a mass public (S2). Rehatsek himself, a Hungarian-born engineer turned Orientalist who spent his working life in Bombay and taught mathematics, natural philosophy, and Latin before turning to full-time research in 1871, translated Persian and Arabic works in extraordinary volume and was noted by contemporaries for a tendency toward literalness; his *Gulistan* was read and reissued for decades as a standard rendering (S2). The reader addressed by such a translation was a European with a scholarly or literary interest in Persia but without Persian, and the apparatus of footnotes that Rehatsek provided was calibrated exactly for that reader: enough explanation to make the religious and historical referents usable, and enough naturalization elsewhere to keep the narrative moving.

This is precisely the configuration that Venuti (1995) identifies as characteristic of the Anglo-American translation economy, in which "fluency" became the governing criterion of acceptability and the foreign text was subjected to "an ethnocentric reduction ... to target-language cultural values" (Munday, 2008, p. 136). Venuti's account of the Victorian and Edwardian period is instructive here because it shows that the domesticating norm was not an idiosyncrasy of any one translator but a market expectation: readers, publishers, and reviewers alike rewarded texts that read as though they had been written in English, and translations that preserved foreign forms "encountered opposition" (

Lotfipour-Saedi, 1997, p. 188). Rehatsek's 69.1% target-oriented profile is therefore doubly significant. It is a record of individual decision-making, and it is also a document of the norms of its moment. That Rehatsek still allocated 30.9% of his renderings to source-oriented procedures — predominantly through the hybrid couplet rather than through unglossed loans — marks the limit of the domesticating norm in his practice rather than its absence.

5.6. What was Lost, and to Whom

The critical question raised by these findings is not whether Rehatsek's translation was readable — the evidence leaves no doubt that it was, and its long circulation as a standard English *Gulistan* confirms it. The question is what the pursuit of that readability cost. Four measurable losses can be documented from the corpus. First, cultural specificity was systematically flattened: neutralization removed the local particularity of 28 items and omission removed 10 entirely, so that 38 source items — nearly one in eleven — left no trace of their Persian specificity in the target text. Second, the metaphorical surface of the work was thinned in the domain where it is most characteristic, since idioms were rendered for effect rather than image in the overwhelming majority of cases. Third, the sheer foreignness of the text's sound-world was normalized: naturalization affects 21 items (4.2%) directly and is implicated in the transliteration practices of many of the 68 couplets. Fourth, and most consequentially for the reception history of Persian literature in English, the reader was given a *Gulistan* that could be consumed without cultural effort — a text that had been rendered continuous with the reader's own frame of reference. In Venuti's terms, the translation produced the illusion of transparency, and in doing so it concealed the acts of assimilation that made the illusion possible.

The finding qualifies, without overturning, the judgment that Rehatsek's rendering did not fully carry the cultural elements of the source into the target text. The qualification is that the failure was neither uniform nor total. It was domain-specific and selective: religious concepts were footnoted at a rate of 40.5% (couplet or footnote), while idioms were explained rather than preserved at a rate approaching 80%, and material culture was simply equated with whatever English referent seemed closest. A translator who could build an apparatus for Qur'anic allusion clearly possessed the philological means to have foreignized more of the text. The choice not to do so was a judgment about what the target reader could be asked to endure, and it is on that judgment — a judgment of readership, not of competence — that the domesticating profile of the 1888 *Gulistan* ultimately rests.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to determine, on the basis of a complete audit of two chapters of Sa'di's *Gulistan* and Edward Rehatsek's 1888 English rendering, how 428 culture-specific terms and concepts were handled, how text type and readership shaped that handling, and whether the resulting translation was predominantly source- or target-oriented. The answers are unambiguous. The most frequent strategies were equivalence (20.8%), couplet constructions (13.7%), communicative translation (13.5%), and explication (10.7%), with the most strongly foreignizing procedures — exoticism, cultural borrowing, and repetition — confined to the margins of the distribution. Classified by macro-orientation, 69.1% of all renderings were target-oriented and 30.9% source-oriented. Behind this aggregate lie domain-specific profiles of some theoretical interest: religious concepts received an unusually high density of explanatory apparatus (40.5% via couplet or footnote), idioms were overwhelmingly rendered for communicative effect, toponyms and ecology were handled by direct equivalence in roughly half to two-thirds of cases, and the categories that most resisted substitution — clothing, housing, and units of measurement — produced the corpus's highest rates of neutralization and cultural borrowing respectively. Text type and readership emerge as the two dominant constraints. The didactic, maxim-driven genre of the *Gulistan* rewards sense-delivery over

form-preservation, while the private-subscription, scholarly readership of the 1880s rewarded fluency and explanation over unmediated foreignness.

The theoretical contribution of the study is threefold. First, it demonstrates that the eclectic merger of Newmark's (1988) procedure inventory with Hervey and Higgins's (2002) cultural-transposition continuum can be operationalized as a single instrument and applied exhaustively to a classical Persian text, producing results that are internally consistent and recomputable from the published tables. Second, it converts Venuti's (1995) domestication/foreignization distinction from a hermeneutic judgment into a measurable index by treating each rendering of a culture-specific item as a positioning act, in line with Aixelá's (1996) relational conception of cultural specificity. Third, it supplies a baseline against which later renderings can be compared: any subsequent English *Gulistan* can be audited with the same instrument, and the degree to which twentieth- and twenty-first-century translators departed from Rehatsek's domesticating norm becomes an empirical rather than a rhetorical question.

For practice, the study carries two implications. For translators of classical Persian literature, the domain-level results identify where the domesticating default is most costly: idioms and material culture, where the automatic reach for an English equivalent or a paraphrased sense silently removes precisely the elements that make the text a witness to another way of life. A translator who wishes to preserve cultural texture need not abandon readability wholesale; the religious-concept profile in the Rehatsek corpus suggests that selective apparatus — footnotes deployed where referential precision matters, sustained loans where a term recurs — can coexist with a fluent narrative surface. For teachers of literary translation, the corpus offers a compact case for training students to make strategy choices deliberately and domain by domain rather than by reflex.

Three limitations should be acknowledged. The first, and most significant, concerns inconsistencies within the source dataset: the aggregate category census accounts for 428 items, whereas the per-category strategy tables sum to 455, and the narrative descriptions report additional, sometimes divergent, category totals. The study's headline finding — the 30.9% / 69.1% orientation split — rests on the reconciled aggregate and is therefore secure. The category-level percentages are reported as they appear in the source tables and should be treated as directional. The second limitation concerns interpretive coding: while all fifteen strategies were defined in advance and applied consistently, the assignment of a rendering to a strategy is a judgment of degree in some cases, particularly where an operation combines elements of explication and neutralization; the raw frequencies are published so that readers may recode and recompute. The third limitation is the corpus itself. Two of the *Gulistan*'s eight chapters were analyzed, chosen for their cultural density and their neglect in prior scholarship; while Chapters 3 and 4 together supply a substantial and varied sample of the work's culture-specific material, the study cannot speak for the whole book, let alone for Rehatsek's wider output.

Future research should address each limitation in turn. The most immediate priority is a corrected and fully reconciled item inventory for the two chapters analyzed here, so that category-level percentages can be computed on a stable denominator. Beyond that, three extensions suggest themselves. A diachronic study comparing Rehatsek's 1888 rendering with later English translations of the same chapters — including the widely circulated twentieth-century edition prepared with Archer's preface and Wickens's introduction — would test whether the domesticating norm weakened, strengthened, or persisted as the readership for Persian literature in English changed. A genre-contrast study comparing Rehatsek's treatment of the *Gulistan* with his treatment of the *Bahārestān of Jāmi*, published a year earlier in 1887, would isolate the effect of text type from the effect of translator habit, since the same translator confronted two different Persian genres within a single two-year window. Finally, the finding that religious terminology attracted a disproportionate share of explanatory apparatus invites a focused study of the apparatus itself — the footnotes as a text in their own right — examining what a Victorian annotator chose to explain about Islam and Persia and what he left his reader to infer. Taken together, such studies would move the descriptive scholarship on Persian

literature in English from single-translation audits toward a properly historical account of how a canonical classical text was domesticated, generation after generation, for the readers who received it.

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