



Content list available at <http://ijltr.urmia.ac.ir>

*Iranian Journal  
of  
Language Teaching Research*

BOOK REVIEW



Urmia University

***Persian Linguistics in Cultural Contexts*, Alireza Korangy and Farzad Sharifian (Eds.). Routledge (2021). xiv+220pp. ISBN: 978-1-138-60134-5 (hbk), ISBN: 978-0-429-47016-5 (ebk)**

Ali Dabbagh <sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Gonbad Kavous University, Iran*

There have been a number of models that probe the interaction of language and culture, including linguistic relativity, linguaculture, and thinking for speaking, to name a few. Despite such a long history of investigating language-culture nexus, there has been a gap regarding the existence of an analytical framework that can assist researchers in *systematically* analyzing the emerging, complex, and heterogeneous nature of this interaction (Baker, 2015). In order to integrate the aforementioned features into a model that explains language-culture nexus, Sharifian (2017) followed a multidisciplinary approach and expanded Palmer's (1996) cultural linguistics to propose an analytical framework that investigates the interconnection of language and *cultural conceptualizations*, the latter of which refers to cultural schema, cultural metaphor, and cultural category collectively. As an attempt to localize such an analysis to a particular context, *Persian Linguistics in Cultural Contexts*, edited by Alireza Korangy and Farzad Sharifian, attempts to provide an application of Sharifian's Cultural Linguistics to myriads of linguistic analyses related to translation, academic correspondence, pragmatics, and literature. This edited compendium is a reader-friendly collection of papers that comes across as appropriate both for postgraduate students and Cultural Linguistics researchers. The volume is organized into 11 chapters in addition to a one-page acknowledgement, information on contributors, an introductory chapter, and an index. All the chapters begin with an introductory note and end with concluding remarks, which provide readers with a short summary of the quintessential findings.

The main purpose of this review is to provide a thematic synopsis of the chapters of this book as well as highlighting its main merits and shortcomings. The possibility that cultural conceptualizations might affect the semantic of translation is rather indirectly discussed in the first chapter. Briefly reviewing linguistic approaches to translation and translational universals, Pounch Shabani-Jadidi discusses the role of culture in translation and emphasizes a translator's familiarity not only with source and target language and culture but also with the culture of the text to be

\* Corresponding author: Gonbad Kavous University, Iran

Email address: [alidabbagh@gonbad.ac.ir](mailto:alidabbagh@gonbad.ac.ir)

© Urmia University Press

doi 10.30466/ijltr.2023.121335

translated. Bringing examples from mass media translation, poetry translation, and political discourse translation, she refers to the problem of untranslatability due to differences in particular cultural schemas, though not directly mentioning this technical term, between Iranian and English cultures. The author of the chapter highlights that such hurdles of translation cause sacrificing cultural schemas of source language in favor of the target language semantic sense, which can result in “censoring the culture of the source language” (p. 21).

The use of address terms in Iranian culture is investigated in two related chapters by Mohammad Hossein Keshavarz (chapter two) and Hooman Saeli (chapter four). Keshavarz’s contribution provides evidence for the shortcoming of Brown and Gilman’s (1960) address formula in explaining the use of address terms in academic correspondence among Iranian academics who value modesty as a virtue in Iranian culture. His data reveal that Iranian academics use ‘self-abasement’ and ‘other-elevating’ honorifics widely due to the Iranian cultural schemas of MODESTY and EHTEHAM (respect). With regard to oral discourse, Hooman Saeli’s chapter reports a similar study that investigates the participants’ use of *jānam*, *jun*, *jān*, and *junam* (all meaning ‘dear’) as address terms in varied hypothetical scenarios in terms of gender, personal and sociocultural distance. The author of this chapter discusses the findings in light of the Iranian cultural schema of EHTEHAM, though he avoids referring to this term directly.

William O. Beeman sheds light on the cultural schema of TA’AROF in Iran in the third chapter. Referring to the cognitive and cultural aspects of TA’AROF, the chapter discusses its verb and pronoun structure, its discursive features with regard to politeness, and the physical movement accompanied with this cultural schema. The chapter continues with probing the logic behind TA’AROF and links it to the hierarchical structure of the Iranian society. Beeman claims that though similar polite behaviors can be found in other cultures such as Japan and Senegal, in Iran, the cultural schema of TA’AROF marks social status differences via using “unique strategies [...] to accomplish personal and social interests” (p. 55).

Another line of research of which this edited volume provides fruitful discussion is investigating the speech act of compliment response from the vantage point of Cultural Linguistics. This topic is probed in two different chapters. The first one is Zohreh Eslami Rasekh and Ali Derakhshan’s comprehensive chapter (chapter five). The authors parse macro and micro level compliment response (CR) strategies and the possible changes with regard to the cultural schema underlying CR patterns in Persian. What distinguishes this study is the collection of naturally occurred compliment responses within daily interactions observed in different settings. Their study can be considered as a complement to Sharifian (2008) in that, unlike Sharifian’s study, they reported a “transitional period from the modesty maxim (*Shekasteh-nafsi*) to agreement maxim” among Iranians and attributed this change to “an overwhelming exposure and absorption of Western cultures due to ease of intercultural communication” (pp. 102–103). The second study on the speech act of Iranian compliment is provided in the last chapter of this volume (i.e., chapter eleven) written by Zahra Abolhassani-Chimeh. This chapter brings to light cultural categories and cultural schemas underlying compliments made by Iranian Persian speakers collected via observation and questionnaire. The chapter also demonstrates cultural conceptualizations and reconceptualizations in relation to various aspects of Iranian compliments, including underlying reasons, linguistic patterns, topics, and the influencing social variables. Of interest among the findings of this chapter is the use of expressions related to prayer, sacrifice, and even dirty words in making compliments. Unlike Eslami-Rasekh and Derakhshan’s study, this chapter emphasizes that not only is the cultural schema of SHEKATEH-NAFSI active among Iranians, but also such self-lowering and other raising speech acts are still alive in the form of OFFER and FORMALITIES.

Studies on emotion concepts in the Iranian context comprise another line of contribution to this edited volume. One of these concepts is ‘violence’ that is parsed by Mohammad Rasekh-Mahand, Rahele Izadifar, and Mojtaba Alizadeh-Sahraic in chapter six. Following Metaphor Identification

Procedure (MIP), the authors analyze the violence metaphors in selected movies, novels, and newspapers released within five main eras in the last fifty years in Iran's contemporary history, namely Islamic Revolution (1970s), The Iran-Iraq war (1980s), President Hashemi's post-war reconstruction (1990s), President Khatami's reformations (2000s), and post-reformation populism (2010s). Their findings showcase a fluctuation in violence representation due to censorship variations across the three media types under analysis. Though the chapter provides a robust metaphor analysis, it does not encapsulate a Cultural-Linguistic perspective. Such a standpoint has been applied to investigating 'sadness', which is explored by Mehri Bagheri in chapter seven. She reports a study that probes cultural conceptualizations of sadness represented in online communication among Iranian Persian speakers. The chapter provides GHAM and GHOSSEH (grief and sadness) as cultural categories and GHAHTI (famine), AZÂDÂRI (mourning), and ZAN (woman) as underlying cultural schemas of sadness in Persian, which are rooted in "historical tragedies, religious practices, and gender roles" (p. 138), respectively. The final Cultural-Linguistic exploration on emotion concepts in this volume is Sara Ghazi's chapter on the conceptualizations of shame in Persian. Applying Sharifian's (2017) model, Ghazi represents the cultural conceptualizations of SHAME in Persian as a positive emotion, which is mainly evoked by religious norms.

As an unprecedented Cultural-Linguistic exploration, Vahede Nosrati unearthed cultural conceptualizations of Persian animal expressions in chapter eight and categorized them into SWEAR, ENDEARMENT, PERSONALITY TRAITS, GENDER DEROGATION, NAGSH (role), and NEJAASAT (dirt). An outstanding feature of this chapter is the comparison of the use of animals in the analyzed expressions with those in a more global usage.

Literature is an underresearched context in Cultural Linguistics studies. Initiated by Sharifian (2020) in analyzing poetry, this line of inquiry is shown to be replete with conceptualizations as "poetry encodes idiosyncratic and cultural conceptualizations as well as conceptualizations that reflect poets' milieu" (p. 26). Rumi is a Persian poet who is well-known for Sufi ideas in his poetry that embraces various conceptualizations. Sepideh Hozhabrossadat attempts to continue this line in her contribution in chapter ten via scrutinizing the cultural metaphors of FANÂ (annihilation), as the final stage in a Sufi's journey to unite with the beloved. The extracted cultural metaphors of FANÂ reflect the complexity of this concept as it is conceptualized through various imagery, including clothes, the five senses, numbers, and natural elements. It is no doubt that Cultural Linguistics has a lot to contribute to literary studies and bring forth novel perspectives on literary works, as does Hozhabrossadat's study in this edited volume.

*Persian Linguistics in Cultural Contexts* can be considered the first edited volume that attempts to provide the application of the newly developed field of Cultural Linguistics in a particular context, i.e., Iranian culture. What makes this collection unique is the representation of cultural conceptualizations minutiae reflected in a variety of discourse types including literary texts, email correspondence, daily conversation, movies, novels, and newspapers. As a volume in Routledge Studies in Linguistics series, *Persian Linguistics in Cultural Contexts* enjoys easy-to-follow and organized chapters that probed updated topics in light of well-cited references and accompanied by the use of illustrative tables, charts, and figures.

Despite these encouraging merits, this edited volume could have been more systematic had its chapters been classified thematically. Furthermore, though it is claimed in the introduction of this volume that it is an attempt to localize Sharifian's (2017) cultural conceptualizations analytical framework, some chapters (i.e., chapters one, two, three, four, and six) are written without being directly grounded on this framework and are only constrained to a limited reference to its terminology in their discussion sections. Besides, some of the chapters that utilize cultural conceptualizations framework refer to this field of study as 'cultural linguistics' (i.e., chapters nine, ten, and eleven) disregarding Sharifian's (2017) proposal to "use the term Cultural Linguistics,

written with upper case initials, to refer to a recently developed discipline with multidisciplinary origins” (p. 2). However, such trivial deficiencies cannot relegate the quality of this edited volume.

As Cultural Linguistics is still in its infancy, more studies should be conducted in order to deepen our understanding of the interaction among cognition, language, and cultural conceptualizations. To that aim, the present collection of studies can provide good models for future researchers in terms of novel conceptualizations, possible sources of data, and research methodology.

## References

- Baker, W. (2015). Culture and complexity through English as a lingua franca: Rethinking competences and pedagogy in ELT. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, 4(1), 9–30.
- Palmer, G. B. (1996). *Toward a theory of cultural linguistics*. University of Texas Press.
- Sharifian, F. (2008). Cultural schemas in L1 and L2 compliment responses: A study of Persian speaking learners of English. *Journal of Politeness Research*, 4(1), 55–80.
- Sharifian, F. (2017). *Cultural Linguistics*. John Benjamins.
- Sharifian, F. (2020). Cultural Linguistics and poetry: The case of Khayyām’s *Rubā’iyyāt*. *International Journal of Persian Literature*, 5, 21–39.