

## A Study of English Translations of Rostam & Sohrab by Dick Davis based on an accurate understanding of the poem

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### Abstract

The latest translation of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh is the English translation of it, by Dick Davis. In this study, Davis's translation of the story of Rostam and Sohrab has been studied based on Antoine Berman's text deforming theory, and its errors have been criticized and analyzed. Those errors are fitted in some elements of Berman's theory: rationalization, qualitative and quantitative impoverishment, and change of tone (ennoblement or clarification). The findings of this study show that most translation problems are due to misunderstanding of the source text. Misunderstanding of the Persian text is rooted in the difficulty of reading Persian and understanding literary texts, especially in poetry, because of the complexity of its syntactic and rhetorical structure and the cultural differences between the origin and destination society. So the authors of this paper believe just familiarity with the source language is not enough to translate literary texts. Being aware of the delicacy of the literary language and the cultural roots of the text is also necessary.

**Keywords:** *English translation of the Shahnameh, English translation of the story of Rostam and Sohrab, translation of the Shahnameh by Dick Davis, inaccuracy of the English translation of the Shahnameh.*

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*Extended Abstract*

**1. Introduction**

Ferdowsi's Shahnameh has been translated into poetry and prose many times in different languages. These include the translations of Ruben Levy, Warner Bros., Jeremy Clinton, and Matthew Arnold, among others. The latest English translation of the Shahnameh is by Dick Davis (2006) and published by Penguin Publications. Davis's translation is a combination of verse and prose (narrative expression: Naqqali) based on the edition edited by Djatal Khaleghi Motlagh. In addition to being a skilled translator, Davis is a capable poet and familiar with Iranian culture (as the source society and the bedrock of composing the Shahnameh). Therefore, the authors of this study consider his translation as a work worthy of consideration.

Numerous and sometimes contradictory opinions have been expressed about the translatability or untranslatability of poetry. Also, due to the difficulty of translating literary works, there are several approaches to translation. In general, translation critique approaches fall into two main categories: Source-oriented and target-oriented approaches. The basis of the source-oriented approach is that the transfer of concept and beauty should be done with loyalty to the original language. But in the target-oriented approach, the priority is the audience's understanding of the target language.

Antoine Berman (1942-1991), a French Source-oriented theorist, believes you should maintain the foreign nature of every foreign text in the target language and make no changes in favor of that language. His theory of text deforming provides the possibility of translation criticism by presenting some elements: rationalization, clarification, expansion, ennoblement, qualitative and quantitative impoverishment, destruction of rhythms, destruction of underlying networks of signification, destruction of linguistic patterning, destruction of the vernacular network, or their eroticization, destruction of expressions and idioms. He discusses the tone of the work and how it is conveyed under elements such as ennoblement and clarification. Style of source work has been considered in qualitative and quantitative impoverishment, clarification, and destruction of linguistic patterning. Commitment to syntactic structures of the source language is also discussed in rationalization. The titles of Antoine Berman's theory are described in detail in the articles: "From the Self and the Other and Distorted Tendencies in Antoine Berman's Cognitive Translation Discourse to Untranslatability" and "A Theory of the Emergence of Translation

Theories and a Study of the Text Distortion System by Antoine Berman". Berman's theory has been used in the articles: "A Study of English Translations of a Hafez's Ghazal based on an accurate understanding of the Poem" by Shirin Razmjoo Bakhtiari (1400) and "A Study of English Translations of a Hafez's Ghazal based on an accurate understanding of the poem" by Ali Afzali and Atieh Yousefi (1395). The authors of this study also found the principles of Berman's theory appropriate for evaluating Dick Davis's translation and used it.

### **Research Question(s)**

This research studies English translations of Rostam & Sohrab by Dick Davis And tries to find and analyze the errors of the translation as well as the causes and factors of their occurrence.

## **2. Literature Review**

Berman's theory is based on the fact that the translator understands the source text but makes mistakes in transmitting the meaning. For the text to be meaningful in the target language, parts of the source text form are lost during translation. But in the study of Davis's translation, it was found that sometimes the translator, with the idea of understanding the source text, presents a translation that does not correspond to the original text. Sometimes the translator, due to the complexity of the poem and the difficulty of reading the Persian text, does not have a complete and correct understanding of the source text and therefore has made a mistake in transmitting the meaning to the target language. These errors (mistakes) generally fall under three elements of Berman's theory: rationalization, impoverishment (qualitative and quantitative), and tone change (aristocracy or transparency).

### **2.1. Rationalization**

Rationalization error in Berman's theory occurs by changing the syntactic structure of the source text. The translator's neglect of the syntax of the source text causes problems in translation, which can be discussed under the heading of rationalization. (Mehdipoor, 2010, p. 59) |In Persian, the major part of understanding the text's meaning is based on syntactic structure. But the differences and complexity of the syntactic structure in the poem make it difficult to understand, especially for the non-Persian-speaking reader. Sometimes the complex syntactic structure in the poem confuses the reader and leads to a misunderstanding of the text. In Davis's translation, there are examples in which the difficulty of understanding the syntactic structure in poems

led to the incorrect recognition of the reference of pronouns and the role of words, resulting in errors in translation.

### ***2.2. Impoverishment (qualitative and quantitative), and tone change (ennoblement or clarification)***

The translator is generally faced with the challenge of choosing words, which is examined under the heading of impoverishment qualitative and quantitative in Berman's theory.( Mehdipoor, 2010, p. 60-61) In translation, a part of the meaning, image, proportions, and space of the source text is always lost with choosing lexical equivalents. In studying Davis's translation, we have encountered cases where misunderstandings of rhetorical structures and unfamiliarity with the cultural context of the original text have caused problems. For example, sometimes the difficulty of fully and correctly understanding the literary industries of the Persian language (ambiguities, allusions, and metaphors) has led to errors in translation. Changing the tone of the text in the translation process falls under ennoblement and clarification of Berman's theory.(Mehdipoor, 2010, p. 59-60) In Davis's translation, ignoring the various exaggerations of the original text is an example of a change of tone. His concern in conveying the idioms and proverbs of the source text is to communicate with the audience in the target language. The idioms or proverbs have been chosen from the target language following the cultural and social atmosphere of the destination community. Neglecting the transmission of the customs of the source community and the positions of prayer, admonition, and praise is also one of the problems of Davis's translation.

### ***2.3. Incorrect reading of the text***

reading the Persian script is difficult due to the lack of movement(short vowels) and the complete mismatch of the word with the sound. This causes reading errors and translation problems. Davis also sometimes misreads the original text, so he misunderstood it. In Davis's translation too, there is some problem due to misreading the original text and misunderstanding it.

## **3. Methodology**

This research studies and criticizes Dick Davis's translation of the story of Rostam and Sohrab in a descriptive-analytical way. Berman's theory (text distortion theory) is used to check the translation. At first, the number of verses is given based on Khaleqi Motlagh's edition of

Shahnameh. Then the Persian Verse is mentioned along with its translation. Finally, By identifying translation errors, The translation is analyzed based on Berman's Theory.

#### **4. Results**

In this research, the translation of the story of Rostam and Sohrab by Dick Davis has been evaluated and criticized based on Berman's text distortion theory. Antoine Berman is one of the critics who believe in the originality of the source text and emphasizes the translator's fidelity (loyalty) to it.

According to this study, errors in Davis's translation generally fall under three elements of Berman's theory: rationalization, impoverishment (qualitative and quantitative), and tone change (aristocracy or transparency). The lack of movement (short vowels) of the script in the Persian text has made it difficult to read. On the other side, the syntactic shifts and the literary industries in the poem have made it difficult for the audience to understand. These have caused the translator to misunderstand the source text and cause translation errors. Also, the cultural and social differences of the poet and translator community have caused the transmission of prayer, admiration, and admonition positions and some literary beauties such as exaggerations and exaggerations in translation to be neglected and to convey proverbs and allusions following the culture and language of the destination community.

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