

The Role of Paratexts in Raising Ecological Awareness A Case Study of the Persian Translation of *Animal Farm*¹

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Abstract

By integrating concepts from eco-translation and ecocriticism, the study seeks to establish what role, if any, paratextual features have in the readers' understanding of ecological themes in the beast fable. In anthropomorphic stories, developing ecological awareness involves moving away from allegorical interpretations to foster a more direct emotional connection with nature. Despite the growing interest in ecological narratives, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the influence of paratexts on ecological awareness, particularly in translated works. To this end, the current study addresses the following questions: "How does the cover of the book hinder or facilitate an ecological reading of a translation?" and "How is allegorical meaning depicted in the cover of the book?" To address these questions, the research conducts a case study of 10 different Persian translations of *Animal Farm*, all translated by Amir Amirshahi but published with varying paratextual designs. By analyzing the cover structures and titles in detail, the research suggests how these factors are likely to influence readers' expectations before they undertake the actual word of the text itself. Due to such paratextual variations, these works can be further divided into opposing extremes and or continuums from allegorical to ecological interpretations, where one pole emphasizes the actual relationship between animals and humans and the other employs animals as vehicles for anthropocentric considerations. By highlighting the significant role that paratexts play in shaping reader perceptions and constructing meaning within ecological narratives, the study helps in understanding how translations can reframe the impression of ecological messages through their paratextual representation.

Keywords: Allegory, *Animal Farm*, Beast fable, Ecological awareness, Eco-translation, Paratexts

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Introduction

With the emergence of new perspectives in Translation Studies, ecology which had previously found its way in linguistics and literary criticism also appeared in the interdisciplinary of Translation Studies. In this regard, *eco-translation* facilitates “an interdisciplinary dialogue between ecology, biology, and economy to name a few” (Farahzad & Ehteshami, 2018, p. 85). It is “an attempt to think through some of the assumptions we make about translation and how they may need to be radically rethought on a planet that, from a human standpoint, is entering the most critical phase of its existence” (Cronin, 2017, p. 3). Having said that, by narrowing down *eco-translation* to ecology as the object of study, it “can be understood as a translation that recognizes and retains ecological themes from the source text” (Bradley, 2021, p. 1).

By employing *ecocriticism*, “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (Rueckert, 1978/1996, p. 107), a translation could be carried out with ecological awareness. In an attempt to do so, Josefina Coisson and Guillermo Badenes (2015) classified *ecotranslation* into three situations by integrating *ecocriticism* and translation: rereading and retranslating works where nature’s voice in the source text was silenced in translation; translating works that present an ecological awareness and have not yet been translated; and translating by manipulating works that originally lack an ecological awareness to create a new, ecologically inspired text. In such translations, what matters is the extent to which the ecological considerations, whether presented in the ST or not, are reflected in the TT. By selecting *Animal Farm*, George Orwell’s canonical work, the present paper outlines animals and their relationships with humans, as a crucial example of ecological awareness. *Animal Farm*, in this regard, is one of the most frequently retranslated novels in Iran, and Amirshahi’s Persian translation stands out as one of the earliest and most significant versions.

Such awareness, then, could be hindered or facilitated by the means of paratexts, particularly the cover of the book. Book cover, indeed, is the first representative of a translation, significantly impacting how the work is perceived and read. (As an example of the significance of book covers and paratextual information in translated literature, see Mousavi Razavi & Allahdaneh, 2018). In this regard, we aim to examine book covers and find out to what extent the allegorical meaning of *Animal Farm* has been altered and reached its literariness of the relationships between animal and human. In this study, we intend to compare the paratexts of ten different publications that use the same translation rather than comparing the paratexts of the target text (TT) and source text (ST). For the purpose of this study, the following research questions are introduced: “How does the cover of the book hinder or facilitate an ecological reading of a translation?” and “How is allegorical meaning depicted in the cover of the book?”

Beast Fables

Animal Farm has been understood primarily as an allegory for the fate of communism in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Dwan, 2012). In this regard, according to Sebastian Schönbeck (2019), animals and environments in fables are considered to be only features of the moralistic function of the genre. “In this sense, all natures depicted in fables finally refer back to the human and are reduced to vehicles for human purposes” (Schönbeck, 2019, p. 111). These fables, then, are read as anthropomorphic representations of humans and their political stances. “Simply put, anthropomorphism involves assigning a human trait to an animal or object” (Burke & Copenhaver, 2004, p. 207). This is the exact case within *Animal Farm* which animals, where characters like Boxer, the hardworking horse, and Napoleon, the authoritarian pig, represent specific human qualities reflecting social classes and ideologies in the human world.

While cultural studies frequently examine old texts through the lens of current perspectives (Coisson & Badenes, 2015), *Animal Farm* also needs such rereading or rewriting. Considering this apparatus, Bruce Pardy (1999) has applied Orwell's template to the environmental question in his *Animal Farm Revisited: An Environmental Allegory*. The power dynamic between humans and other animals is the result of such ecocritical reading of *Animal Farm*. It challenges the idea of human supremacy over other living beings, especially animals. In this regard, eco-translation desires to move to a post-anthropocentric identity where no life form is superior to any other, where, in animal farm's words, *all species are equal*.

Apart from its allegorical reading, *Animal Farm* speaks to our perceptions and treatment of animal bodies. Orwell himself desires such reading, in which a struggle between human and non-human animals comes to the fore:

I proceeded to analyse Marx's theory from the animals' point of view. To them it was dear that the concept of a class struggle between humans was pure illusion, since whenever it was necessary to exploit animals, all humans united against them: the true struggle is between animals and humans. (Orwell, 1947, p. 3)

In fables, however, the meaning of the animals seems to be reserved for humans. Jacques Derrida (2008) argues in *The Animal that Therefore I Am* that he desires to "avoid fables" and by associating them with an "anthropomorphic taming", he argues that fabulation remains a "discourse" only "of man, on man, indeed on the animality of man, but for and in man" (p. 37). To fully grasp the anthropocentric and anthropomorphic nature of the fable, we should consider how animals are often portrayed as simplistic and easily manipulated beings in these stories. They are often depicted as existing solely to serve human needs and desires, or as lacking the capacity for independent thought or action. In addition, fables such as *Animal Farm* employ anthropomorphic language and imagery, which can further blur the lines between humans and animals. Giving animals attributes associated with humans can

make it difficult for readers to see animals as distinct from humans, and it can contribute to the anthropocentric worldview that is often presented in fables.

Allegorical Meaning

Reading beast fables allegorically takes the animal down to only a symbol of human traits without including their ecologically significant actions which they play in the advancement of the narrative. As a result, while quite effectively communicating moral lessons, these fables may inadvertently obscure crucial ecological themes. Then, how can we shift our focus from allegory to ecology?

By defining allegory as “say one thing and mean another” Bloomfield (1972) suggests that, aside from textual scholars who aim to preserve the verbal surface of a work, most readers and interpreters are allegorists since they operate with meaning levels other than that provided by the immediate words (p. 302). Having said that, “the text”, as Bloomfield (1972) notes, “is the skin which makes possible the existence of the work”, which indicates that the text is primary and fundamental to the presentation of the entire structure and meaning of a literary work (p. 311). Having said that, he pinpoints that the very skin “is not simple to determine and contains at least two, and possibly more, levels” (Bloomfield, 1972, pp. 311–312) The challenging issue in interpreting allegory, then, lies in understanding the surface of the work, that is, being fully aware of the literal level of the text itself.

Talking about the literal level, it tends to lose its own being, its inherent quality and richness, in its referentiality. Within any language, a significant portion of words serve as referential or lexical elements, functioning as vehicles for meaning that extend beyond their immediate linguistic surroundings to denote ideas, objects, actions, or broader concepts (Bloomfield, 1972). Through such referentiality, the meaning of a text distances itself from its literal sense. “The literal sense”, however, “makes the work exist as art” (Bloomfield, 1972, p. 312). It is the

explicit, surface-level interpretation of a work, devoid of allegory, that allows us to see and appreciate words for their own artistic value. "For this alone, which creates the very basis of the verbal art, we must be grateful for the literal sense" (Bloomfield, 1972, p. 312). Thus, when the meaning of a work is interpreted literally, our perception about it does not mean it is entirely devoid of artistic quality, but rather it may enhance the appreciation in most of its artistic qualities.

Believing this, Peter Berek (1978) suggests that the *literariness* of literature lies in emphasizing language for its own sake rather than for the sake of its referentiality. Considering literariness and allegory as two poles of a cline, reading could be led in two different directions based on the clues provided. According to a well-known view, "an allegory should immediately suggest its own key" (Eco, 1986, p. 161). When integrated with the role of paratexts, this statement suggests that paratexts could evoke an allegorical reading by exhibiting interpretive clues. It is not, however, the only possible artistic interpretation of the work. "When meeting an allegory the interpreter could also decide to interpret it in its literal sense" (Eco, 1986, p. 161). Paratexts' role, then, gains significance where allegorical meaning linguistically embedded in beast fables could be questioned by ecological elements of the paratexts.

Ecological Paratexts

Paratext is primarily described in the opening paragraph of her book by Genette as something that "enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public" (Genette, 1997, p. 1). Paratexts provide the framework for presenting translated works, which means paratexts could or should affect the way a translated work is received and frame the reader's interpretation of the text. In terms of their location, paratexts can be either attached to the text (peritexts) or at a distance from the text (epitexts) (Genette, 1997, p. 5). Cover, title, preface, blurb, etc. fall under the category of peritexts. Epitexts on the other hand, are disseminated through the media or private communication, such as

interviews and letters or comments (from now on, by using paratexts we rarely mean epitexts in particular).

Before reading a text, all we are familiar with about the text is through the paratexts. All the *visual signs* surrounding the text which include book covers, in-text illustrations, visual images, fonts, layouts, colors, etc., provide information about the text and can manifest certain ideologies (Farahzad, 2012, p. 43). In this regard, paratexts play an important role in shaping our assumptions. Here, the role of paratext could be felt, whether it arouses an ecological reading or not. Using ecological elements in the paratext can foster an ecological reading, promote ecological awareness, and contribute to creating a more ecologically sustainable world.

The classification of certain elements as ecological is generally uncontroversial. For instance, a tree—along with its green color—the Earth itself, or a scenic sea view can all be regarded as ecological elements. Considering natural phenomena mostly as ecological elements, it is also true about damages that the human race has done to the environment; thus, a dumped can or a cigarette end could also be an ecological element. Observing each of these elements on the cover should convey an ecological assumption. Consequently, one way to evoke an ecological reading of the story is to utilize such elements via the paratexts. Aside from those mentioned non-verbal signs that could be found on the cover of a book, verbal signs of ecological wisdom are earthly. As Gerber (2012, p. 46) emphasized the title of the source text provides one of the first invitations to potential readers of the text; the title of the target text could also be manipulated in order to arouse a desired assumption. These signs could also be used in paratexts other than just the cover. A blurb for example could explicitly talk about ecological issues or implicitly desire to evoke such matters.

Methodology

Corpus

The study employs a qualitative research design, focusing on the analysis of ten different book covers of Amir Amirshahi's Persian translation, which had been published at the time this research was conducted. In table 1, these 10 different publishers are represented. By choosing different covers for one and the same translation, it was aimed to minimize the influence of the target text and the translator on the paratexts. In this way, we can focus on how different visual representations and design choices shape readers' interpretations and expectations, independent of the content or style of the translation itself.

Table 1

No	Title	Translation of the Persian title	Publisher
1	قلعه حیوانات (Ghale Heyvanat)	Animal Castle	گیوا/Giva
2	قلعه حیوانات (Ghale Heyvanat)	Animal Castle	عطر کاج/Atr-e-kaj
3	قلعه حیوانات (Ghale Heyvanat)	Animal Castle	امیر کبیر/Amir-kabir
4	قلعه حیوانات (Ghale Heyvanat)	Animal Castle	علمی و فرهنگی/Elmi-va-farhangi
5	قلعه حیوانات (Ghale Heyvanat)	Animal Castle	جامی/Jami
6	قلعه حیوانات (Ghale Heyvanat)	Animal Castle	آرسن/Arsen
7	قلعه حیوانات (Ghale Heyvanat)	Animal Castle	پارس کتاب/Parsketab
8	مزرعه حیوانات (Mazrae Heyvanat)	Animal Farm	روزگار/Roozgar
9	مزرعه حیوانات (Mazrae Heyvanat)	Animal Farm	کتاب کوله پشتی/Ketab-e-kooleh-poshti
10	مزرعه حیوانات (Mazrae Heyvanat)	Animal Farm	هاشمی/Hashemi

Data Collection

As mentioned in the previous section, one way to evoke an ecological reading of the story is to utilize ecological elements in the paratexts. Consequently, various elements of paratext are explored to determine their effectiveness in evoking ecological meaning. This is done by analyzing the front cover, back cover, title, and blurb. To do so, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) *Grammar of Visual Design* was employed to expose the underlying ideologies that these features convey. The visual analysis in this paper will look at three of the levels relevant to this study as proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020):

1. "active relations between *participants* (represented people, places and things, including abstract 'things'), *processes* (the represented actions of these participants) and *circumstances* (e.g. the place where these actions occur)" (p. 45, emphasis in original).
2. The relationship between color, light (as signifiers), and their associated meanings (as signified) which influences the recognition of intended messages.
3. "social, cultural and historical factors" which serve as tools for revealing possible relations (p. 45)

Data Analysis

The data analysis will involve several integrated steps, beginning with a descriptive evaluation of the visual and textual elements present on each book cover based on the three levels previously mentioned. These elements will be assessed for their contribution to either reinforcing allegorical readings—such as through anthropomorphic imagery or political symbolism—or facilitating ecological readings—such as through the use of natural colors, non-anthropomorphic visual cues, or textual references to environmental themes. An interpretive approach will then explore how these elements collectively influence reader perceptions and shape expectations regarding ecological or allegorical interpretations before engaging with the main text. By categorizing the paratexts along a continuum from allegorical to

ecological interpretations, the study aims to understand the impact of design choices on readers' initial impressions and engagement with broader thematic concerns.

Findings

Titles

The Persian titles are the first element of the paratexts to be examined. Three of them have used *مزرعه حیوانات* [Animal Farm] for their titles. Other seven works have altered the title and used *قلعه حیوانات* [Animal Castle]. Using a word that is more associated with humans, i.e. castle, strengthens the anthropomorphic reading and expectations. In other words, the word "castle" in the title acts as a clue that evokes an allegorical reading of the work. The titles of works 1 to 7, then, obstruct an ecological reading.

Covers

This section offers an in-depth examination of the front covers, back covers, and blurbs found in the selected translations of *Animal Farm*. Each element will be examined for its contribution to the overall messaging and ecological themes conveyed to the reader.

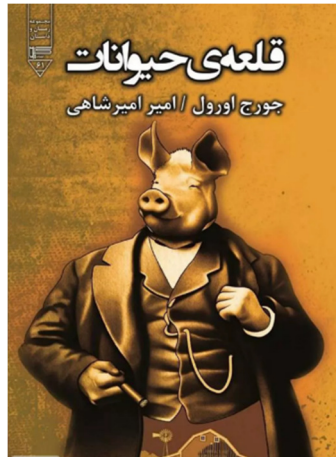


Figure 1

Considering other elements of the cover, participant in Figure 1 features a man with a pig head. The man is not a rural, or an ordinary one. The aristocrat's clothing is a sign of his high social and political status. Using a pig head on a human body is

a social reference representing the participant as an extreme form of anthropomorphism that is sure to get attention. The character’s act of holding a cigar could be interpreted as a significant element that symbolizes environmental destruction.



Figure 2

In Figure 2, a black cover is occupied by a repetitive pattern of a pig wearing Stalin’s uniform which is a clear historical reference. Then, we are facing an anthropomorphic participant that hinders an ecological reading. An interesting point, however, is about its blurb. It is a direct quotation from the text of the book, the translation of this segment:

Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. He does not give milk, he does not lay eggs, he is too weak to pull the plough, he cannot run fast enough to catch rabbits. Yet he is lord of all the animals. He sets them to work, he gives back to them the bare minimum that will prevent them from starving, and the rest he keeps for himself. Our labour tills the soil, our dung fertilises it, and yet there is not one of us that owns more than his bare skin. (Orwell, 1946/2004, p. 4)

This paragraph indicates the relationships between humans and farm animals. This does not suggest an allegorical meaning but it is a speech uttered by an animal which is a cry against human oppression. We can conclude that this section of the paratexts contributes to an ecological understanding by illustrating the genuine relationship between animals and humans. Therefore, we are encountering a situation with conflicting elements; some elements are prompting a reading ecologically and

some others allegorically.

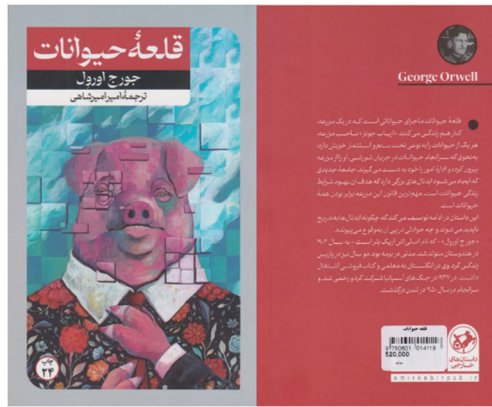


Figure 3

The cover of the third one (Figure 3) is a combination of a pig and a human as its participants. In addition to this anthropomorphic feature, there is an additional historical reference that triggers the communist atmosphere of the story, the color. Red color which is significant in the flags and logos of communist parties and organizations, serves as an element of allegory because of its special usage in the sake of communism. On the other hand, the blurb of this work, explains the allegory of the story and uses a vast variety of words related to communism such as *استثمار* [exploitation], *شورش* [rebellion], *جامعه* [society] and so on.

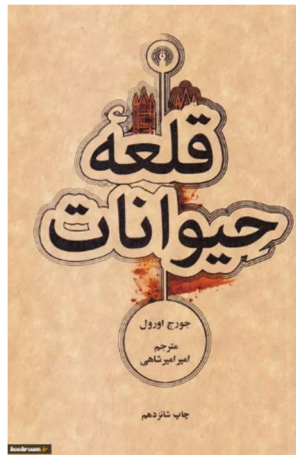


Figure 4

The fourth one (Figure 4) could be considered as a neutral one, in which none of the elements is related to either ecology or communism. It has a simple cover

without any significant active relations between participants, processes, and circumstances that could be interpreted allegorically. Its title, however, is aligned with the allegorical interpretation.



Figure 5

Figure 5 incorporates the color green, which is widely recognized as an environmentally significant element. It lacks any explicit suggestion or marker related to any historical, cultural, or social reference, allegorical meaning of story, or anthropomorphism. There is no figure of a pig-headed human, nor is there a participant dressed in Stalin’s uniform. The cover features only a simple green background with a black roof and a crow, without any accompanying text or blurb. When such a work does not elicit any presumption about the allegorical base of the story, it does not hinder an ecological reading, and by using a green color all over the cover, it may facilitate such a reading.



Figure 6

The sixth one (Figure 6) clearly invites an allegorical interpretation. Despite its use of a human-pig figure wearing Stalin's uniform, it also explicitly desires an allegorical reading. It mentions in the blurb that we should abandon the surface of the story which is simply about animals and the oppression they suffer, and read it as an allegory for human society. It also benefits the red color which is a historical reference to communism. Its relations between participants, processes, and circumstances obviously hinder an ecological reading and seek to touch entirely a human-oriented view.

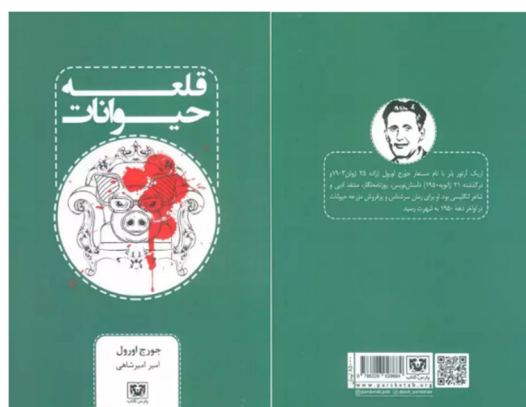


Figure 7

In Figure 7, again a green color is used. There is no human-pig figure but a pig head is settled on an armchair. This active relation between the participant and the circumstance could be interpreted as putting animals in a position related to humans. It also used red color but not as a communist element. Some bloodstains are manifest which could be interpreted as butchering. The blurb is neutral, providing biographical information about the author without indicating any particular approach to interpretation. Despite the pig and armchair picture, the cover, somehow, could facilitate an ecological reading.

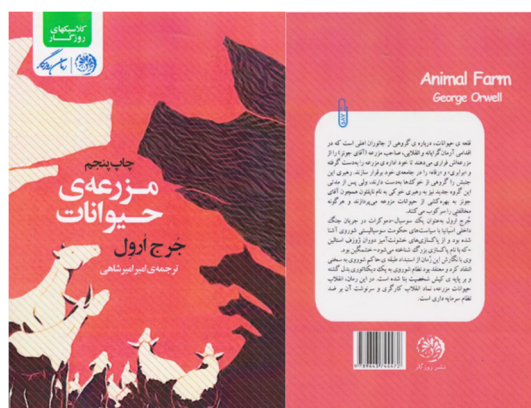


Figure 8

Considering Figure 8, an entirely red cover is obvious. It draws a picture of an animal parade. These active relations between participants, processes, and circumstances trigger an allegorical image. The use of red color and parade both hand in hand represents its relevance to communism. But the paratexts insist more and more on explicitly inviting the reader for such a reading. Therefore, the blurb uses an introductory text that explicitly suggests what the reader will face. The use of words such as revolutionary, idealism, leadership, movement, and so on captures the reader’s presumption. Altogether, this work hinders any ecological reading by using such elements in the paratexts.



Figure 9

In Figure 9, the use of human-pig hybrid with a Russian uniform is apparent again. This time, it has used a cartoon-like drawing. Despite that, there is no other significant element that could be interpreted as allegorical or not. This item does not

facilitate an ecological reading but somewhat hinders it.



Figure 10

The final item, Figure 10, features a royal crown adorned with a pair of horns and a lizard's tail. This striking imagery can be interpreted as a symbolic fusion of human and animal characteristics, suggesting a deeper allegorical meaning. The crown—typically associated with authority and power—juxtaposed with the horns and lizard's tail, invites viewers to explore themes of dominance and the primal aspects of nature within the context of human identity. This work has no blurb and it lacks any reference to communism or ecology. In terms of ecological reading, this item is less of a barrier.

Discussions

Regarding peritexts, we could classify these 10 works within a cline (Figure 11) which two poles of it are ecological and allegorical reading.

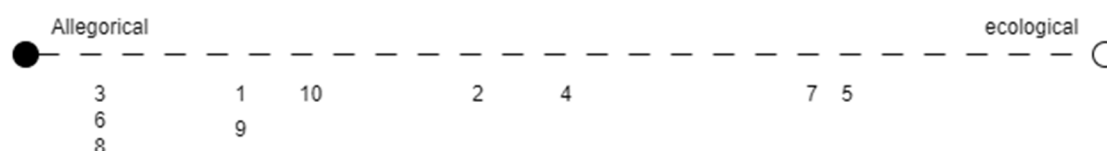


Figure 11 *Allegorical versus Ecological Interpretation*

Considering this cline, items 3, 6, and 8 have strong preferences for being read allegorically. They utilized both verbal and non-verbal signs to explicitly evoke

such a reading. On the other hand, items 5 and to a lesser degree 7, have elements that could trigger such an ecological reading. The use of the color green was a significant factor in doing so. In the middle of this continuum, item 4 has a little distance from item 2. The fourth item has neither ecological elements nor an allegorical one. The second item has both ecological and allegorical items. Items 1, 9, and 10 are considered to be allegorical but still have a distance from the extreme version.

Paratexts increasingly obstruct an ecological interpretation by incorporating more allegorical elements. These additional layers of meaning can divert readers' attention from literal ecological themes, leading them to focus instead on symbolic interpretations that may not align with the surface environmental messages. As a result, the intended ecological significance can become obscured, complicating the reader's ability to engage with the skin of the work. These elements could be verbal and non-verbal. In terms of verbal aspects, the titles of the works can be manipulated to elicit a specific reading. As the results showed, most of the works have altered the title to highlight the allegorical meaning of the text. Paratexts may also include a blurb, as another verbal element, in which the desired kind of reading is explicitly (or implicitly) mentioned. In the case of non-verbal signs used in the paratexts, any human-oriented activity performed by animals could be considered an element that triggers an allegorical reading. In our study, the elements we examined included figures such as a human with a pig's head and a pig dressed in a uniform, as well as events like an animal parade. These participants and processes serve to illustrate the complex interplay between human and animal representations, highlighting themes of identity and societal roles within the context of the narrative. Another kind of non-verbal signs that suggests we are not dealing with an ecological situation, but rather something related to human morals, is the use of color. The presence of red, a color often associated with communism, indicates that the reader can expect themes related to this ideology.

On the other hand, we faced elements that do facilitate an ecological reading. While these elements may not be presented prominently or intentionally, they can still raise the reader's awareness. Having said that, the role of paratexts in creating an ecological reading is much more important than it may initially appear. "Paratexts accompanying translations" could be "employed to shape ideological perceptions" (Bolouri & Rezvani, 2023, p. 76). Taking action directly on the text presents considerable challenges such as the ethical dilemmas faced by translators and the potential compromise of translation accuracy. Paratexts, however, offer a more secure avenue for guiding readers toward desired interpretations. Being separated from the text, it is a proper ground for conscious efforts to challenge anthropocentric views and promote ecological awareness. The role of translation, in this regard, goes beyond the traditional confines of linguistic and cultural exchange. As demonstrated in our findings, the inclusion of a relevant quote from the text in the blurb could significantly influence readers' assumptions, potentially fostering an ecological interpretation and heightened awareness. By providing a direct connection to the text's surface, such a quote can guide readers toward recognizing and engaging with the environmental messages embedded within the skin of the work, thereby enhancing their overall understanding of its ecological implications.

Conclusion

Given the current environmental emergency in the world, it has become more urgent to pay attention to non-human entities. This urgency was manifested in our inquiry into the representation of animals in beast fables where more often than not, animals are humanized and turned into containers of human preoccupations. In this regard, we sought to achieve a critique of the dominant anthropocentrism, which unfortunately sees animals merely as resources to be utilized, and to argue the case for their intrinsic and ecological value. By questioning such a perspective, a case study was planned for one of the most well-known beast fables, *Animal Farm*. We set out

to investigate whether it is possible for paratexts to stray the text from its previously established allegorical interpretation. It was noticed that paratexts tend to obscure honest ecological readings of the texts by overgrowing allegorical readings that distract the readers from the surface environmental tenets of the texts. Such a tendency makes it hard for the readers to appreciate the work in full since they may be more concerned with the deep meaning which is not aligned with the skin of the work. Verbal aspects including altered cover titles and blurbs, for instance, lead readers in directions that promote allegorical rather than literal interpretations of the text. Non-verbal elements, such as pictures of animals behaving as humans and the use of cultural colors, tend to push an anthropocentric view which hinders the appreciation of the interconnection of humans and animals.

An ecological approach to beast fables highlights the role of paratexts in shaping readers' perceptions and interpretations of such translations. As demonstrated, while exerting changes on the text may not be simple, it is often the paratexts that could provide crucial cues for an alternative reading. It is through the paratextual elements that translations may be a host of conscious efforts at challenging an anthropocentric view in the interest of ecological awareness to perform their responsibilities beyond linguistic and cultural fidelity. This approach, then, allows for the promotion of ecological consciousness without compromising the integrity of the original work.

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