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A critique of the translation of “resilience” in the Persian language

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Abstract

Resilience, as a new concept, has become one of the most frequent words in sustainability literature in the last decade. As a result of the critical condition caused by the communication breakdown between “man” and “environment” in recent decades and the subsequent challenges of the human environment in the current century, this concept has been expanded and highlighted in various sciences. On account of its frequent use in various disciplines, this term has found its way to Persian literature as “Tab Avari” and then became a common term. However, this concept is proposed to provide a different interpretation of the relationship between man and the environment and offers a new approach to the survival of both sides of this relationship. It draws upon the ability to “resist” rather than the ability to “adapt” and “be compatible.” Given that the translation of the term “resilience” seems to be more based on the ability to resist than adaptability, this article seeks to shed light on its meaning by exploring the concept of resilience and then by examining the meaning of the words “resilience” and “measurement”. The conceptual consistency of this translation assesses the suitability of the equivalence for the intended meaning. Moreover, the essay attempts to offer a suitable equivalence based on an analysis of the meaning of resilience. The findings of this research indicate that “resilience” is in conflict with the latest developments in the resilience approach, and it seems that the word “adaptability” has more capacity to express its meaning.

Keywords: Persian language, translation, compatibility, definition, sustainability

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Is the term 'Tab Avari' an accurate equivalence for resilience?

Extended Abstract

The term resilience, increasingly prominent in global scientific discourse due to environmental crises, has analogously attained the conceptual influence once held by sustainability. Initially rooted in ecology (Holling, 1973) as the capacity of systems to absorb disturbances while maintaining function, its meaning has evolved from "returning to equilibrium" toward dynamic adaptation in response to internal and external change (Folke, 2016; Bahrami & Hemmati, 2019). Unlike sustainability—focused on resistance and endurance—resilience emphasises adaptability, flexibility, and "staying in play" under unpredictable conditions. In Persian scholarship, resilience entered scientific literature mainly via psychology before permeating architecture and urban planning. It was predominantly translated as "Tab Avari" (bearing up), derived from Persian roots signifying patience, endurance, and tolerance. Lexicographical evidence (Dehkhoda, Amid) confirms its semantic alignment with static persistence—precisely the orientation resilience strategies seek to transcend. This terminological mismatch risks misrepresenting the conceptual essence, thereby distorting both academic and policy discourse. A practical illustration—Yanweizhou Park, China—demonstrates the paradigm shift: from resistance-based flood defence (walls, dams) to adaptive design integrating seasonal inundation as ecological and aesthetic asset. Such cases exemplify adaptability as proactive transformation, not passive endurance. The study proposes "Sazgari" (adaptability or compatibility) as a more faithful Persian equivalent. This term conveys active alignment with changing conditions, continuous structural recalibration, and socio-ecological flexibility—core attributes of resilience strategies. Lexical sources corroborate its connotations: congruence, accommodation, and constructive adjustment. Given that a concept's title shapes first-level understanding, especially among non-specialists, precision in translation is crucial. Misaligned terminology may produce conceptual ambiguity, undermining strategic and operational applications in sustainability, urban governance, and climate adaptation. This article calls for scholarly debate to refine the Persian lexicon, advancing both theoretical clarity and applied urban resilience practice.

In contemporary scholarly literature, resilience does not denote mere resistance or endurance, but rather the capacity for dynamic adaptation to changes and disruptions. Nevertheless, its common rendering into Persian as "tāb-āvari" (endurance) conveys a static and passive connotation that stands in contradiction to the very essence of the concept.

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