

## ÇEVİRİ SÜRECİ: İRANLI OKUYUCULAR ARASINDA TRANFACE'İN (ÇEVİRMENİN ÖNSÖZÜ) DURUMU

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### Öz

Çevirmen Önsözü (Tranface) çevirmen ve çeviri hakkında yararlı bilgiler içeren okuyucular için değerli bir kaynaktır. Ayrıca çevirmenin daha görünür olmasını ve toplumdaki statüsünü yükseltmesini sağlamaktadır. Bu çalışma, İranlı okuyucular arasındaki çevirmen önsözü olgusu ile ilgilidir. Araştırmada Genette'nin (1997) önsöz/tranface tanımına dayalı olarak hem açık uçlu hem de kapalı uçlu maddelerden oluşan 12 soruluk bir anket hazırlanmıştır. Ayrıca İran'daki çeviri üniversitelerinde öğretim üyesi olan üç çevirmenlik bölümü hocası ile zengin bir tartışma ortamı oluşturmak ve istenen sonuçları elde etmek için yarı yapılandırılmış bir görüşme gerçekleştirilmiştir. Sonuçların gösterdiği gibi, katılımcıların büyük bir çoğunluğu kitabı okurken ya çevirmen önsözü (Tranface) olgusuna aşına değildir ya da görmezden gelmiştir. Bu, çevirmen önsözünün tatmin edici olmayan konumuna ve ne yazık ki çevirmen önsözünün İranlı okuyucular arasındaki düşük statüsüne işaret etmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Çeviri, Önsöz, Tranface, Çevirmenin Önsözü, Çevirmenin Görünürlüğü

## THE TRANSLATION PROCESS: THE STATUS OF TRANFACE (THE TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE) AMONG IRANIAN READERS

### Abstract

Tranface is a valuable resource for the readers that contains useful information about the translator and translation. It also enables the translator to become more visible and promote his/her status in the society. The present study investigated the status of tranface among Iranian readers. To do so, a questionnaire consisting of 12 questions of both open-ended and closed-ended items was prepared based on Genette's (1997) definition of the preface/tranface and the importance he considers for both. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview was set up with the three translation teachers, who were faculty members of Iranian translation universities, to have a rich discussion and obtain the desired results. As the results indicated, a great majority of the participants either were unfamiliar with tranface or ignored it when reading the book. This alludes to the unsatisfactory position of tranface and its low status among Iranian readers, which unfortunately tranface enjoys it.

**Keywords:** Translation, preface, tranface, translator's visibility.

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## Introduction

Translation is a unique opportunity given to the target readers to become familiar with the foreign culture. It also carries out a communicative mission between two different languages and cultures. Wilss (1982) states that translation is “a specific form of interlingual communication linked to linguistic acts and decisions” (p. 14). For Buhler (1979, p. 451), translation is “a communicative process” in which the message is transferred from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). Hlebec (1989) argues that translation is “a process of creating a translated text, which has two aspects: recreation and modification” (p. 129). Recreation, as he states, refers to the expression of the source text (ST) intentions in the target text (TT), and modification points to a change in the ST intention that goes with recreation within the same text.

Translators as intercultural communicators and interlanguage mediators play a crucial role in fulfilling the purpose of the translation. Bikmanienė (2019) considers the translator as “a mediator between readers and books” because of the opportunity s/he provides “to enjoy literature from a variety of cultures” (p. 184). Translators, as Newmark (1991) believes, have “a responsibility not only to their employer and the client, but to the truth” (p. 40). In addition, translators are responsible for “the process of transferring a written text from SL to TL in a specific socio-cultural context” (Hatim & Munday, 2004, p. 6). Thus, it is important that such responsible and influential individuals, who do their best to produce high-quality translations, are seen and introduced to the audiences.

One way to achieve this is *tranface*. *Tranface*, as Batchelor (2018) argues, has been included in “anthologies of reflections on translation in the context of efforts to establish translation studies as a discipline” (p. 25). Genette (1997) discusses that the preface is one type of paratextual elements that comes with a literary text “to present it” or “to make present its reception and consumption in the form of a book” (p. 1). Moreover, the preface, alongside other paratextual elements, converts a text into a book and then offers it to the readers as Genette (1997) states.

In the case of *tranface*, Genette (1997) mentions that its function is mostly the same as the function of the authorial preface because it introduces the original work and the author who produced it. His words indicate that both *tranface* and preface are considered as essential parts that can help enhance the understanding of the audiences about the book and provide both the translator and author with the opportunity to be more visible. Under Genette’s (1997) definition

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of the preface/tranface and the importance he considers for both, the present study aimed to investigate the position of tranface among Iranian readers by seeking their opinion and familiarity with it, and the attention they devote to such an important paratextual element before reading a text. To achieve the objective of the present study, the following question was raised:

1. What is the status of tranface among Iranian readers?

## **2. Review of the Related Literature**

### **2.1. Tranface**

Gomez (2003) uses the term prologue for preface and states that the translator's prologue should be placed in the enunciation because it is considered a significant element for literary communication. To define the prologue, as she discusses, the notions of discourse and communication, as two important elements, need to be taken into consideration. Gomez argues that translators' prologues have a dual position because it points not only to the work of the foreign author but also to the translation of the original work produced by the translator. The translator's prologue follows two purposes. The first, as she implies, is to make an introduction of the work of a foreign author, and the second refers to making an introduction of himself through all the methods of classical rhetoric. This leads to the acceptance and judgment of the readers of the translation produced by the translator and the work itself.

According to Newmark (1988), the translated books need to have tranface to provide a description of "the usage and meanings of the author's terms" (p. 93). He believes that it is not necessary for some works, such as a scholarly work, to write tranface due to the fact that the intended readers are not required to learn about "the translator's informed assistance both in the work and the comment" (p. 93). He further states that in some serious books, such as novels, poems, and other important books, tranface is a need because they not only are of great importance in the TL culture but also exert a considerable influence on the language, culture, literature, and beliefs of target readers. Thus, the answer of whether a translated book has been successful in fulfilling the above objectives should be found in tranface, as Newmark argues.

For Pellatt (2013), the preface is one of the most visible paratextual elements that, alongside introduction, purports "to contribute explanation and justification" (p. 3). It also prepares the reader for the process of reading the text. She expresses that tranface may shape the cross-cultural reading of the text fundamentally. In the case of poetry, Pellatt denotes that tranface, alongside other paratextual elements, can help the reader of translation "approach and appreciate

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the uniqueness of concrete poetry” because of the reader’s involvement with such elements and “his/her own transactions with the text” (p. 113). This, as she notes, was approved via a study of paratextuality conducted on the translation of concrete poetry. In general, tranface and other paratextual elements, as she argues, cause the reader’s reading and interpretation to become automatically conventional.

## **2.2.Genette’s Definition of Preface**

In his interpretation of the preface, Genette (1997) begins to describe the function of the preface. According to him, the function of the preface varies from one genre to the other. That is to say, each preface may have its own function that is different from the other. The type of the preface is determined by “considerations of place, time, and the nature of the sender” (p. 196). He also believes that the function of the preface is not the same as the note because the preface attempts “to get the book read and to get the book read properly” (p. 197). According to Genette, these two objectives, the former is described as minimal and the latter as maximal, are obviously tied to three aspects of the original/authorial preface because of its authoriality and originality, and introductory and monitory of its location. The two objectives, as Genette implies, refer that the preface is the starting point for reading a book by the reader.

The second objective, as Genette argues, is to inform the reader of what is necessary for a proper reading. In other words, the author gives the reader the opportunity to be aware of “the origin of the work, the circumstances in which it was written, the stages of its creation” (p. 210). Genette (1997) states that it is necessary to “put a high value on the text without antagonizing the reader by too immodestly” (p. 198). To achieve this, the subject, as he emphasizes, must be given a high value even if it leads to the inadequacy of its treatment. In a sense, if the author/translator, as he explains, is not equal to his/her subject, the reader must nevertheless read his/her book for its content. Thus, along with the fact that the preface plays a considerable role in showing the importance of the subject and placing a high value on the text, the reader can be considered the main motivation behind the creation of the preface.

## **2.3.Recent Studies in the Field**

Most studies in the field have concentrated on the aspects of tranface, such as form, content, and function. For example, Bikmanienė (2019) gives attention to the genre features of tranface to determine differences and similarities between Lithuanian and English prefaces. For this purpose, she analyzed 30 Lithuanian and 30 English translators’ prefaces in terms of genre

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elements, namely the format, genre moves, and functions. According to the results, Lithuanian translators had a preference for more invisibility in their prefaces by devoting their attention more to the author and less to their own evaluation and explanation on translation issues. By contrast, English translators tended to be more visible by focusing on the translation process and the subjective analysis.

In another study, Aktener (2019) looks into Ergenç's preface, who is a Turkish translator, to find whether he is influenced by the court cases and the censorial conditions when writing his preface. To do so, the researcher focused on the function and searched for the reasons behind Ergenç's preface. The results showed that Ergenç made an attempt to inform the unfamiliar readers with the original author's style encompassing fragmented narrative and obscene words to stop readers from misinterpreting. In conclusion, Ergenç disproves any authorial responsibility for fragmentation and obscenity in *exterminator* and makes himself invisible for the readers.

Haroon (2017) focuses on the content and form of tranface to discuss the functions served by the contents of this introductory note. To end this, he collected and examined the translators' prefaces from translations published in Malaysia. The results derived from his study indicated the important role tranface plays in making the reception of the translated text easier while helping the translator become visible and make his/her voice heard.

Thanks to the recent studies in the field, the significance of the present study has been highlighted. This is because this study addresses the existing gap in the research that has not been conducted to this date. In other words, the recent studies in the field mainly focused on the analysis of the aspects of tranface from the perspective of different approaches. This study gives a special attention to other side of the subject matter that has not been focused on. That is to say, the present study is more centered on the status of tranface among Iranian readers rather than on tranface itself. It is hoped that the results derived from this study help clarify the importance tranface has in the visibility of the translator and improvement of the readers' understanding of the translation. The findings of the present study should be beneficial to translators, translation students, and trainee translators.

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1. Instrumentation**

A questionnaire consisting of two parts was designed for data collection from the participants of the present study who were selected conveniently from the masses, from the educated to the uneducated individuals. The number of the participants was 419 of whom females ( $N = 297$ ) outnumbered males ( $N = 122$ ). They were well aware of the objective of this study and the important role they could play in it before answering the questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire includes questions about demographic information, such as age, gender, and educational level. The second part encompasses 12 questions of both open-ended and closed-ended items that were about the importance of tranface and its effectiveness in improving the readers' understanding of the book and familiarity with the translator and the SL culture. Furthermore, the participants were asked to express their opinions about the content and characteristics of tranface. Four translation teachers who had teaching experience in Translation Studies were invited to validate the questionnaire. The feedback received from them was helpful and constructive that led to some correction in wording and content of the questionnaire. Test-retest reliability was applied to measure the reliability of the questionnaire. Thus, the questionnaire was administrated to a group of people who shared the same characteristics of the sampling with an interval of two weeks. The scores derived from two tests were correlated to evaluate the stability of the test over time. The results indicated reliability of the test ( $r = .803$ ).

Along with the questionnaire that was used for data collection, a semi-structured interview was set up to create a rich discussion and achieve the desired results. The interviewees were selected conveniently on the basis of their position and experience in teaching translation. They were Bahram Mowlaie, Roozbeh Guitoo, and Marjan Farjah, the three faculty members of Islamic Azad universities, South Tehran and Roodehen branches, and Allameh Tabataba'i university respectively. Mowlaie was also the Head of English Language Teaching Department and Farjah the Head of French Translation Department at the same universities. The semi-structured interviews were conducted at their offices and lasted for 31, 22, and 17 min respectively. It should be noted that the researcher took notes during the three semi-structured interviews.

#### **3.2. Design**

A questionnaire survey method was applied in the present study. A questionnaire survey, as Preston (2009) states, provides the researcher with the opportunity to “explore spatial and social

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variations in people's attributes, attitudes, and actions” (p. 46). She argues that the suitability of the method is only for certain research questions and depends on the information types that are sought for the answer of a research question and the people out of whom the researcher wants to draw information. The use of a survey questionnaire in this method enables the researcher to collect data from a large portion of the participants with cost saving in a short time. That is to say, a survey questionnaire, as Price et al., (2015) imply, is “the heart of any survey research project” (p. 184). That is why this type of method was applied for the current study.

### 3.3. Procedure

After the questionnaire was ready, it was administrated to the participants. Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the researcher decided to use instant messaging services, such as WhatsApp Messenger and Telegram, for data collection. In this way, he shared the questionnaire in three groups in WhatsApp Messenger, of which had more than 350 active members, and in one group of Telegram having more than 200 active members. The same procedure was also applied to receive the completed questionnaires. To analyze the questionnaire, an in-depth analysis of each question was carried out, and the frequencies and percentages were calculated and illustrated in tables. A nonparametric test, chi-square ( $X^2$ ), was run to justify the hypothesis.

### 4. Results and Discussion

According to the results, a majority of the participants (61%) held a bachelor's degree; whereas a minority of the participants (3%) didn't have a degree. The rest held either a master's degree (29%) or a doctoral degree (6%). Furthermore, near half of the participants (47%) belonged to the age range of 20-29 years; followed by 30-39 (29%) and 39-49 years (14%). The rest (10%) belonged to other age ranges.

Table 1

Answer Frequencies of the Participants to the Questions 1 to 3 of the Questionnaire

Questions	Answers	<i>f</i>	%	Answers	<i>f</i>	%	Total	
							<i>f</i>	%
Question 1	Yes	243	58.0	No	176	42.0	419	100.0
Question 2	Yes	197	81.0	No	46	19.0	243	100.0



Question 3	Yes	61	31.0	No	136	69.0	197	100.0
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As Table 1 indicates, more than half of the participants (58%) were familiar with tranface; whereas less than half of them (42%) were not. A great majority (81%) of those who had familiarity with tranface declared that the books they have read included tranface while 69% of them read the books without paying attention to tranface. Only 31% expressed that they devoted careful attention to tranface and read it.

Table 2

Answer Frequencies of the Participants (Who Devoted Careful Attention to Tranface) to the Questions 6 to 12 of the Questionnaire

Questions	Answers	<i>f</i>	%	Answers	<i>f</i>	%	Total	
							<i>f</i>	%
Question 6	Yes	38	62.0	No	23	38.0	61	100.0
Question 7	Yes	22	36.0	No	39	64.0	61	100.0
Question 8	Yes	37	61.0	No	24	39.0	61	100.0
Question 9	Yes	48	79.0	No	13	21.0	61	100.0
Question 10	Yes	47	77.0	No	14	23.0	61	100.0
Question 11	Yes	53	87.0	No	8	13.0	61	100.0
Question 12	Yes	50	82.0	No	11	18.0	61	100.0

According to Table 2, from those who devoted careful attention to tranface, more than half of them (62%) agreed that tranface enhanced their understanding of the novel; whereas 38% disagreed with this fact. More than one-third of the participants (36%) expressed their agreement with the inability of tranface to make them familiar with the SL culture. This was in opposition to the opinions of a majority of the participants (64%). 61% of the participants believed that tranface helped them become familiar with the ST and the original author, while 39% did not have the same belief. In contrast to the opinions of a small number of the participants (21%), a large number of them (79%) agreed that tranface plays a significant role in the visibility of the translator. Furthermore, 77% of the participants reached the agreement that tranface had considerable influence on their judgment of the translation and its acceptance. A vast portion of



the participants (87%) also were in agreement with the effectiveness of tranface in establishing communication between the translator and the readers. By contrast, a few participants (13%) disagreed with this fact. Most participants (82%) came to the agreement that tranface is a need and should be made by the translator.

#### 4.1. Chi-Square Test ( $X^2$ )

Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) is a statistical test used to measure how a model compares to actual observed data (Hayes, 2020). As he explains, it is run to find the difference between the observed and expected frequencies of the results derived from a set of events or variables. Thus, the  $X^2$  was applied to test the hypothesis and see whether there is a significant relationship between the participants' answers to each question or whether these variables are related. As Table 3 indicates, the relationship between the participants' answers to questions 3, 9, 11, and 12 is significant because the p values of these questions are lower than .05 ( $p < .05$ ). Thus, the hypothesis was rejected for these questions. According to Table 3, the p values of rest of the questions are higher than .05 ( $p > .05$ ). That is to say, the hypothesis was retained for questions 1, 2, 6, 7, and 10. It implies that there is no significant relationship between the participants' answers to these questions.

Table 3

Summary of the  $X^2$  for the Participants' Answers to Each Question

Questions	$X^2$	<i>p</i>
1 Are you familiar with tranface/the translator's preface?	.001	.974
2 Did most of the novels you read include tranface?	3.435	.638
3 If yes, did you pay attention to it or read it?	9.115	.002
6 Did tranface help you better understand the story?	.054	.816
7 Did tranface help you become more familiar with the source language culture?	.029	.864
8 Did tranface help you get to know the original text and its author?	.096	.756
9 Did tranface help you get to know the translator and enables him/her become more visible?	7.419	.006
10 Did tranface affect your judgment of the translation and the acceptance of it?	2.387	.122

11	Can tranface be effective in establishing a relationship between the translator and the readers and drawing the audiences' attention to him/her translation?	8.329	.003
12	Is tranface a need to be written by the translator?	5.913	.015

#### 4.2. Discussion

According to the results, nearly half of the participants were not familiar with tranface, and among those who had familiarity with tranface, the majority ignored it when reading the book. The reason for such unfamiliarity and ignorance, as Mowlaie argues, is low rate of reading per capita in Iran. In approval, Iranians spend about 7 hours and 41 minutes per month on book reading, which is almost equal to 1 hour and 9 min a week (Sheikhi, 2019). In comparison with the countries like India and Thailand, where rate of reading is about 10 hours and 42 min per capita, and 9 hours and 24 min a week respectively; this is a matter of great concern.

Besides, Guitoo (personal communication, June 12, 2021) believes that translation is not of great importance to Iranian readers who consider the translator as an ordinary person whose task is to translate a text from one language into another. He also states that Iranian readers read in a hurry and not spend enough time on book reading. This causes them not to pay attention to and become familiar with tranface. According to Guitoo, the responsibility behind this problem lies with those who mainly create and maintain culture in the country, such as Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG), and universities. Moreover, he puts the blame on the translators and publishers who give no importance to tranface and disregard it.

While Mowlaie (personal communication, June 22, 2021) sees the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) as the leading player in creating culture, Farjah (personal communication, May 15, 2021) believes that it should start from the ground up. Kindergartens and primary schools, as she implies, can be the starting point of this cultural movement and play a crucial role in achieving it. This leads to an increase in the rate of reading per capita in the society, attention to preface, and respect for the translator. In a sense, the higher the per capita, the more attention the tranface will gain, and consequently the more admiration the translator will have. Hence, creating culture is a matter of importance that should be given attention.

The other considerable result was that a minority of the participants, who were familiar with tranface, stated that the books they read did not include tranface. The remarkable point is the

absence of tranface in these books even if they are few in number. This may be because of the translator who had done little to make tranface, or the publisher who has decided to remove it due to economic conditions that deteriorate daily and lead to financial difficulties. This helps the publisher save on paper and ink when publishing the book. Eliminating tranface from the book is of no benefit to the translator since it prevents him/her from becoming more visible. It also brings no benefit to the readers because it keeps them away from having useful information about the translator and translation.

The participants were also asked to name three main characteristics of tranface alongside their reason(s) for such traits. A great majority of those who considered tranface when reading the book believed that tranface should be brief and comprehensive because the readers invest time in reading it and include all necessary information about the translator and his translation, and be appealing to attract the attention of audiences to the book. This question was followed by a question about what the content of tranface should be. According to the answers, tranface needs to encompass information about the translator's background, such as his experience of education, age, and other related information. It should also include information about the translation process, for example translation strategies/methods and obstacles/difficulties. In addition, tranface, as the participants argue, requires information about the author and culture of the origin.

Fortunately, the effectiveness of tranface in understanding the story better and getting useful information about the translator was confirmed by a significant portion of those who considered it when reading the book. Furthermore, they agreed with that tranface provides the opportunity for the translator to make him/herself more visible and establish a relationship between the readers and him/herself. This alludes to the importance of the content and function of tranface. That is to say, if the content of tranface contains relevant and helpful information about the translation, such as employed translation strategies/methods and constraints, as well as about the translator, for example a very brief biography of him/her and his/her motivation and reason(s) for choosing the original book, the function of tranface, whether it is explanatory or informative, it has the possibility to enhance the readers' understanding of the book.

## **5. Conclusion**

Tranface is an integral part of a book that translators or translation scholars mention in a positive way (McRae, 2010). Dimitriu (2009) considers tranface as a valuable document for the scholars'

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theoretical research because it provides evidence, explanations, information, and feedback on several key concepts and areas of interest for the discipline of Translation Studies. The present study investigated the status of tranface among Iranian readers by asking for the readers' opinion and familiarity with it. According to the results of the present study, tranface is not in a satisfactory position and does not enjoy high status among Iranian readers due to the ignorance and unfamiliarity of a great majority. This is not good news for both the translator community and the Iran's society. Hence, a collective effort must be made to improve the status of tranface among Iranian readers and put it in a high position in the society.

The current study offers some pedagogical implications for those responsible for consolidating and promoting the status of the translator and translation in the society, for example IRIB, MCIG, universities, and publishers.

IRIB has an important role to play in showing the worth of translators and their contribution to different sectors of the society by setting up interviews with experienced translators and presenting the history of translation to the audiences. Making TV programs about Translation Criticism and other translation-related topics is another way to highlight this profession. MCIG is just as important in achieving this. By making some rules for publishers, MCIG can make them include tranface in their publications, otherwise they will not be given license to print their books. This causes publishers to ask translators to add tranface to their translations. In addition, publishers can contribute to this process by advertising the translator and his/her translation on their social media, such as Facebook and Instagram. The task of universities is to make translation students aware of the importance and role of tranface in their future status in society by offering more courses relating to tranface, and translation market.

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