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The Shifting Worlds of Gilead: An Analysis of Adaptation Shifts in *The Handmaid's Tale*

Gilead'ın Değişen Dünyaları: Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü'ndeki Uyarlama Kaymalarının
İncelenmesi



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Abstract

This study aims to do an adaptation analysis of the film version of Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by considering film adaptations as a type of intersemiotic translation. Film adaptation, conceptualized as an intersemiotic and creatively interpretive form of translation, constitutes a complex and inherently subjective transformation of a written source text into the audiovisual medium (Gottlieb, 2007). Analyzing the shifts intrinsic to adaptations is of utmost importance, as these changes signify the creator's approach for interpreting the original text. Examining these changes helps comprehension of the adaptation process. Perdikaki (2016) presents a model for the methodical analysis of adaptation shifts from book to film by employing an interdisciplinary approach that integrates different perspectives from Translation Studies and Adaptation Studies. This model is notable, because it provides the first comprehensive framework that integrates both Translation and Adaptation Studies. Perdikaki's model (2016) has two components, namely a descriptive/comparative component and an interpretive component. The former one highlights the medium-independent categories in which shifts are identified. These categories enable the comparison and analysis of meaning transfer among artworks belonging to different mediums. The latter one is aimed to clarify the rationale for these changes. The implementation of this model on the film adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* unveils the shifts in adaptation. The analysis reveals that adaptation shifts are clearly evident at the descriptive level, influencing key elements such as plot structure, narrative techniques, characterization, and setting. These shifts are realized through processes of modification, modulation, and mutation. The interpretive component has been omitted because it would expand the scope.

Öz

Bu çalışma, film uyarlamalarını bir göstergelerarası çeviri türü olarak ele alan Margaret Atwood'un distopik romanı *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü*'nün film versiyonunun uyarlama analizini yapmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çevirinin göstergelerarası ve yaratıcı yorumlayıcı bir biçimi olarak kavramsallaştırılan film uyarlamaları, yazılı bir kaynak metnin görsel-işitsel ortama karmaşık ve öznel bir dönüşümünü içermektedir (Gottlieb, 2007). Uyarlamalara özgü kaymaların analiz edilmesi büyük önem taşımaktadır, çünkü bu değişiklikler yaratıcının orijinal metni yorumlamaya yönelik yaklaşımını göstermektedir. Bu değişiklikleri incelemek uyarlama sürecinin anlaşılmasına yardımcı olmaktadır. Perdikaki (2016) kitaptan filme uyarlama kaymalarını sistematik olarak incelemek için Çeviribilim ve Uyarlama Çalışmaları alanlarından farklı görüşleri birleştiren bir disiplinler arası yaklaşım kullanarak bir model ortaya koymaktadır. Bu model hem Çeviribilim hem de Uyarlama Çalışmalarını birleştiren ilk kapsamlı çerçeveyi sunduğu için önem taşımaktadır. Perdikaki'nin (2016) modeli, betimleyici/karşılaştırmalı ve yorumlayıcı olmak üzere iki bileşenden oluşmaktadır. Birinci bileşen, kaymaların gözlemlendiği ortamdan bağımsız kategorileri vurgulamaktadır. Bu kategoriler, farklı ortamlara ait sanat eserleri arasındaki anlam aktarımının karşılaştırılmasını ve analiz edilmesini



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sağlamaktadır. İkinci bileşen, bu kaymaların gerekçesini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu modelin *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü*'ne uygulanması uyarlamadaki kaymaları ortaya çıkarmıştır. Analiz, uyarlama kaymalarının betimleyici bileşende belirgin bir şekilde tespit edildiğini, olay örgüsü yapısı, anlatı teknikleri, karakterizasyon ve zaman/mekân kategorilerindeki değişiklikleri kapsadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu kaymalar, sistematik olarak modifikasyon, modülasyon ve mutasyon aracılığıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Yorumlayıcı bileşen, kapsamı genişleteceğinden dolayı çalışmaya dahil edilmemiştir.

Keywords adaptation · adaptation shifts · Perdikaki model · film adaptation · *The Handmaid's Tale*

Anahtar Kelimeler uyarlama · uyarlama kaymaları · Perdikaki modeli · film uyarlaması · *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü*

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Introduction

Translation Studies has developed into a multidisciplinary field that bridges theoretical research and practical application. Initially regarded as the transfer of verbal meaning, translation is now understood as a complex process involving multiple modalities, acts of representation, and intercultural exchange. Meaning-making in translation draws on a diverse range of semiotic resources, extending beyond verbal and oral forms to encompass multimodal configurations that integrate audiovisual elements. Building on this expanded perspective, recent advancements in the field have increasingly focused on analytical models that offer more nuanced examinations of intersemiotic and multimodal texts (Perdikaki, 2017a, p.2). Tymoczko (2007) asserts in her important work *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* that the interdisciplinary nature of Translation Studies is crucial and is now starting to evolve. In this perspective, Adaptation Studies are considered a promising field that can enrich both disciplines.

Adaptation and translation have parallel characteristics as processes. Both involve the transmission of meaning between texts and rely on the context of their creation and reception for complete comprehension of the transferred meaning. Cattrysse (2014) identifies several shared characteristics between adaptation and translation:

- Both involve products positioned within a complex context of producers, receivers, and multiple agents;
- They encompass utterances or texts and the relationship between these texts and their receivers;
- Translation and adaptation are deemed unchangeable processes, as back-translation does not replicate the source text, and a novelization of a film adaptation differs from the original novel;
- Both processes are teleological, shaped by source and target (con)text conditions, which significantly impact decision-making;
- Concepts of "equivalence" are evident in both adaptation and translation (Cattrysse, 2014, pp. 47-49).

Another scholar who highlights the conceptual parallels between adaptation and translation is Venuti (2007). He notes that "the analogy between the two processes frequently appears in the literature, yet it is seldom subjected to in-depth analysis or scrutiny" (p. 27). He identifies a critical gap in the field, emphasizing the complexities involved in examining adapted works. Venuti (2007) also argues that "similar to translation, a film adaptation recontextualizes its prior materials, yet this process is inherently more extensive and complex, as it involves the shift to a distinct, multidimensional medium that is shaped by its own unique traditions, practices, and production conditions" (p. 30).

The scholars mentioned above collectively propose that both translation and adaptation can be viewed as similar processes, wherein a textual source is subjected to comparable stages in the production of the final material. This perspective reinforces the notion that adaptation may be regarded as a modality of

translation, thereby allowing adaptations to be examined within the scope of Translation Studies. In this regard, Perdikaki (2016) introduced an analytical model for the study of adaptation, which she grounded in Leuven-Zwart's (1989) taxonomy of translation shifts.

Building on research from Translation Studies and Adaptation Studies, Perdikaki's model presents an analytical framework for examining shifts in adaptations. Designed as a methodological framework, this model seeks to systematically analyze adaptation as a form of intersemiotic translation, providing a versatile approach applicable to a wide range of adaptation cases (Perdikaki, 2017a, p. 10).

In this study, the concept of adaptation will be approached as a form of intersemiotic translation. The analytical model proposed by Perdikaki (2016) will be employed as the principal methodological framework, offering a systematic approach to analyze the shifts in the film adaptation of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Theoretical Background

In the process of translating literary texts into visual or audiovisual formats, the semiotic systems involved differ significantly in their modes of expression. Regarding content, the challenge of translatability remains a central concern, as it is recognized as an inherent attribute of all semiotic systems. The term "intersemiotic translation" was coined by Jakobson in his article titled *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation* which was published in 1959. He identified three translation types:

- Intralingual translation or rewording interprets verbal signs through other linguistic signs.
- Interlingual translation or translation proper interprets linguistic signs in a different language.
- Intersemiotic translation or transmutation interprets verbal signs through nonverbal signs (Jakobson, 1959, p. 114).

He clarified this new concept by stating, "intersemiotic transposition, from one system of signs into another, e.g., from verbal art into music, dance, cinema, or painting" (Jakobson, 1959, p. 118). He offered only a limited perspective, leading to significant gaps in the understanding of intersemiotic translation. In response, Eco (2001) refined Jakobson's classification, revising both its framework and terminology to address these limitations. His model reinterprets Jakobson's three types of translation from an intra-systemic perspective. The inter-systemic interpretation expands Jakobson's concept of intersemiotic translation to encompass adaptation and a range of synonymous processes, while the intra-systemic interpretation involves alterations across languages, different systems, and performance (Eco, 2001, p. 100).

In his conference paper *Multidimensional Translation: Semantics Turned Semiotics*, Gottlieb (2007) defines translation as "a process, or its resultant product, in which a combination of sensory signs conveying the intention to communicate is replaced by another combination that either mirrors or is influenced by the original entity" (p. 3). He categorizes his taxonomy into inspiring and conventional translation. In this framework, abstract art is viewed as a powerful source of inspiration, while translations are characterized as more grounded, though conventionalized in their form and approach. Film adaptation is positioned within Gottlieb's (2007) framework of intersemiotic and inspirational translation. The concept of inspirational translation is especially pertinent, as it emphasizes a more dynamic and adaptive approach to translation, in contrast to traditional models that prioritize strict fidelity to the source text (Gottlieb, 2007, pp.4-5).

Although research into intersemiotic translation continues, a methodological framework for examining adaptation from novel to film as a form of translation remains unestablished. In the preface to the 1998 *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, Baker (1998) highlighted the lack of substantial research on the nature of intersemiotic translation. She remarked that Jakobson's triadic division introduces the potential for categories such as intersemiotic and intralingual translation, yet these classifications have

not been effectively utilized in scholarly research (Baker, 1998, p. xvii). In his work *Film (Adaptation) as Translation: Some Methodological Proposals*, Cattryse (1992) identifies a similar gap in the field, contending that while certain theorists strive to expand the boundaries of Translation Studies, their efforts face notable challenges. He argues that there is no compelling justification for limiting the concept of translation to mere cross-linguistic transfer and advocates for an expanded scope that incorporates a contextual semiotic approach (Cattryse, 1992, p. 68). His significance arises from his pioneering work in examining the interdisciplinary relationship between translation and adaptation. Both processes share several key characteristics, including being human-produced and context-dependent, intertextual in nature, potentially irreversible, and subject to the concepts of faithfulness and equivalence (Cattryse, 2014, pp. 47-48).

The theorists discussed above contend that translation and adaptation are analogous processes, as both involve the transformation of a textual source through comparable stages to produce a final work. These shared characteristics such as the recontextualization of a source text and the transfer of meaning across different mediums, suggest that film adaptation can be viewed as a form of intersemiotic translation. Consequently, adaptations can be situated within the broader framework of Translation Studies, offering a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between textual transformation and meaning-making across diverse forms.

Film adaptations entail a complex and subjective interpretation of source material, influenced by the multifaceted nature of the cinematic medium and the diverse agents involved in the process within a given context. This raises the question of whether it is feasible to offer a rigorous and valid evaluation of a film adaptation, considering the numerous factors at play. Drawing parallels with translation scholars such as Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), Catford (1965), van Leuven-Zwart (1989), and Hatim and Mason (1997), who have analyzed translation shifts, Venuti (2007), in *Adaptation, Translation, Critique*, underscores the importance of focusing on these shifts, particularly the additions, deletions, and substitutions that emerge in the adaptation when compared to the original text. He argues that these shifts are not neutral; rather, they are instrumental in conveying the filmmaker's interpretive stance, thereby influencing the meaning and reception of the adapted work (Venuti, 2007, p. 33).

Building on van Leuven-Zwart's (1989) taxonomy of translation shifts, alongside key concepts from Translation Studies, Adaptation Studies, and narratology, Perdikaki (2016) introduces a methodology for the systematic analysis of adaptation shifts. Emphasizing the conceptual parallels between translation and adaptation, she introduces a methodological tool for examining the shifts that occur during the adaptation process, conceptualized as intersemiotic translation. The methodology section will provide an in-depth analysis of the framework developed by Perdikaki (2016) for investigating these shifts.

Methodology

Perdikaki (2016) presents a model for examining adaptation shifts, grounded in van Leuven-Zwart's (1989) model for assessing translation shifts, supplemented with ideas from narratology, Translation Studies and Adaptation Studies. In her paper (2017a), she clarifies this model based on the parallels between translation and adaptation, particularly regarding adaptation as an aspect of intersemiotic translation, and analyzes the shifts that arise during the process of adaptation. She employs van Leuven-Zwart's (1989) taxonomy of translation shifts, integrating concepts from narratology, Translation Studies, and Adaptation Studies, to highlight the presence of specific narrative elements in both verbal and visual narratives. The model (Perdikaki, 2016) comprises both a descriptive/comparative component and an interpretive component. The former comprises four categories of narrative units which are medium-independent, acting as the focal point for examining adaptation shifts. The descriptive component incorporates the categories of plot structure, narrative techniques, characterization, and setting. Plot structure corresponds to the framework

of the story; narrative techniques involve the methods used to present the story to the reader or viewers; characterization pertains to the portrayal of characters; setting refers to the environment, including both temporal and spatial dimensions (Perdikaki, 2017a, pp. 5-6). Modulation, modification, and mutation are the three categories that are used to classify the stated types of adaptation shifts. These categories are drawn from van Leuven-Zwart's (1989) model. The taxonomy of shift types developed by van Leuven-Zwart (1989) will not be elaborated upon in this work; rather, the focus will be on displaying the shifts in order to make their interpretation easier or more straightforward.

The adapter converts the literary work into a screenplay, with the final product shaped by a collaborative process involving multiple agents and their respective agendas (Lefevere, 1992, p. 9). Perdikaki (2018, p. 170) argues that these agendas, driven by ideological, economic, and prestige factors, influence both literary translations and film adaptations, aligning with Lefevere's patronage principle. Perdikaki (2018) applies Lefevere's concept to the film polysystem, identifying the ideological component as the film's message, the economic component as the production process, and the status component as the reputations of the producer, director, and source novel. Filmmaking involves both artistic and commercial dimensions, with decisions reflecting these motivations. As Perdikaki (2018, p. 174) asserts, shifts in adaptations are driven by financial, artistic, and social factors.

Perdikaki (2018) identifies three interpretive categories for adaptation shifts: economic, creative, and social. The adaptation shifts are analyzed in relation to commercial success for economic reasons. Creative reasons pertain to the reinterpretation of source material. Sociocultural and spatio-temporal dynamics shape adaptation within the category of social reasons (Perdikaki, 2018, p. 175). These categories are not always clearly defined and often overlap, making their boundaries ambiguous and sometimes challenging to distinguish.

This study provides an overview of *The Handmaid's Tale* novel and its film adaptation, with a focus on the adaptation shifts in the cinematic version. The analysis predominantly draws on the descriptive category from Perdikaki's (2016) model, as this dimension is pivotal for a detailed examination of the shifts and alterations within the text, particularly in the context of adaptation. This category provides a key framework for understanding how narrative and thematic elements evolve when adapted from the novel to the visual medium, shedding light on the complexities of these shifts in both structure and meaning. The primary data for this study consists of Margaret Atwood's acclaimed novel *The Handmaid's Tale* and its film adaptation, with data collected from the printed version of the novel and the Blu-Ray edition of the film. Data collection was conducted manually, involving an in-depth reading of the novel and a detailed viewing of the film. Throughout this process, notes were compared using Perdikaki's (2016) categories. The methodology for data analysis is comparative, focusing on a direct comparison of the notes derived from both the novel and the film.

Adaptation Shifts in *The Handmaid's Tale*

This section of the study provides a comprehensive background on both the novel and the film adaptation, offering a detailed summary of the novel's plot to establish the foundational context. Following this broad overview, the analysis will delve deeper into the specific adaptations, exploring their narrative choices, structural changes, and thematic transformations. This will enable a more nuanced examination of how the source material is reinterpreted and reimagined within the visual medium.

About the Novel and the Film Adaptation

In Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, the protagonist, Offred, navigates life in the dystopian society of Gilead, a totalitarian regime that has risen in a future America. The government of Gilead

enforces a strict societal divide, segregating individuals into those who possess power and resources and those who are subjugated. This division is largely a response to a widespread infertility crisis, exacerbated by an environmental catastrophe. In this context, women are reduced to mere property, categorized into roles such as wealthy wives and concubines, the latter of whom are subjected to ritualized sexual servitude in an effort to combat infertility.

Offred is assigned to serve the Commander and his infertile wife, Serena Joy, as a handmaid, whose sole purpose is to bear children for the ruling elite. Her personal freedom is severely restricted, and she is under constant surveillance by the Eye, the secret police. The state mandates a monthly ritual in which Offred engages in a sexual ceremony with the Commander, while Serena observes. The rise of Gilead's regime is sparked by a violent coup in which the country's political leaders, including the president and members of Congress, are overthrown and executed. The new rulers of Gilead systematically remove all legal rights, including those of women, depriving them of property, jobs, and access to education. In response to the global infertility crisis, driven by chemical contamination, the society created the institution of handmaids, whose primary function is to bear children for high-ranking government officials.

Through flashbacks, we learn that the protagonist, Offred, is married to Luke and has a daughter, but the rise of the totalitarian regime forces her into servitude. Before being captured and separated from her family, she tries to escape to Canada. Under the regime, she is brainwashed and stripped of her identity, becoming *Offred*, a name that signifies her status as the property of the Commander, Fred. Despite the oppressive environment, the Commander develops a complicated affection for Offred after multiple failed attempts to conceive.

Serena Joy, the Commander's wife, secretly arranges for Offred to have sex with the Commander's driver, hoping to achieve pregnancy. In exchange, Offred agrees to provide Serena with information about her daughter, who is taken away by the authorities. Offred's fellow handmaid, Ofglen, informs her about Mayday, an underground resistance movement working to overthrow Gilead. However, after discovering her husband's adultery, Serena denounces Offred, leading to her capture by the Eye, Gilead's secret police. The novel ends with Offred's uncertain future as she is taken away by Nick, the household servant, in a dark van with several men, who reveals that he is part of the Mayday rebellion.

The 1990 film adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*, directed by Volker Schlöndorff and scripted by Harold Pinter, brings Atwood's dystopian vision to life, exploring themes of control, autonomy, and resistance within a totalitarian regime. Set in the Republic of Gilead, a theocratic state that has replaced the United States, women's roles are defined by their reproductive capabilities. Offred (Natasha Richardson), a fertile woman, is stripped of her identity and forced to serve as a "Handmaid," tasked with bearing children for the ruling elite. She is manipulated and mistreated, particularly by Serena Joy (Faye Dunaway), the Commander's wife, who resents the duties imposed on her. The plot intensifies when Offred forms an illicit relationship with Nick (Aidan Quinn), the household chauffeur, symbolizing her desire for emotional connection and personal freedom. Through her struggle against the oppressive regime, Offred's journey highlights the resilience of the human spirit and the inherent drive to resist injustice. The 1990 film adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* adopts a more direct and linear narrative structure in contrast to the novel's introspective and fragmented approach. The film emphasizes the external events and interpersonal relationships that shape Offred's experience in Gilead, presenting a unified, action-driven storyline. This culminates in Offred's decisive attempt to escape Gilead, which contrasts with the novel's ambiguous and open-ended conclusion. The adaptation employs a stark visual aesthetic, minimizing internal monologue, and offers a clear depiction of Gilead's rigid social hierarchy. While the film succeeds in encapsulating the essence of Atwood's dystopian

world, it simplifies the narrative to provide a more accessible portrayal of Gilead's atrocities, making it approachable for audiences unfamiliar with the source material.

Identifying the Adaptation Shifts

The narrative elements are not only distinct but also deeply interconnected, with many overlapping in ways that shape the overall storytelling. Throughout the adaptation process, a variety of shifts occur, with particular attention given to those that significantly alter or influence the central plot. In addition to these major plot shifts, changes in character relationships will also be examined in depth. This exploration will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these shifts, both in plot and in interpersonal dynamics, contribute to the transformation of the narrative as it moves from one medium to another.

Plot Structure

The Handmaid's Tale is a novel that features a non-linear and fragmented narrative structure, exploring the complex world of Gilead and Offred's mind. The story shifts back and forth between Offred's current life in the theocratic Republic of Gilead and her recollections of her past, particularly those that occurred before to the acquisition of power by the regime. A slow-moving and fragmented method is taken throughout the story, which is a reflection of Offred's mental state as she clings to her past in order to maintain her identity. It is via her present perceptions and memories that the dystopian characteristics of Gilead start to become apparent. The story employs episodic moments such as Offred's secret meetings with the Commander, her fleeting interactions with Nick, and her infrequent observations of resistance movements, to examine issues of autonomy and revolt. Each episode provides insights into individuals' responses to repression: some struggle, some acquiesce, and some exploit the system for minor triumphs. The episodic framework emphasizes Offred's psychological journey over external action, centering her story on survival in a repressive environment rather than on acts of heroic opposition.

In the story, Offred is abducted by two men who assert they are affiliated with the Mayday opposition, yet they may possibly be operatives of the dictatorship, resulting in an ambiguous climax. The narrative concludes with a future epilogue, portraying Offred's account as a relic of the past, thereby questioning the extent of Gilead's cruelty. The epilogue functions as a meta-commentary, indicating that Offred's story has endured and is being examined by future scholars. The work features a cyclical and multifaceted story structure, revealed through fragmentary recollections and introspective monologues. This engenders a claustrophobic, intense experience that encapsulates Offred's fight to endure, resist, and preserve her identity in a world that negates her autonomy. The novel concludes ambiguously, imparting a profound lesson regarding the fragility of freedom and the transience of truth.

The film simplifies the novel by presenting events in a linear, chronological order, starting with Offred's capture and entry into Gilead, and moving through her training and assignment to the Commander's household. This approach makes the plot more accessible, sacrificing the novel's layered suspense and mystery. The film's tone shifts from a dystopian drama to a more personal narrative. The film simplifies characters' relationships, focusing on a romantic subplot rather than a complex one. Characters like Serena Joy are portrayed in a less nuanced manner, reducing complexity. High-stakes events are highlighted, minimizing internal rebellion. The film's structure emphasizes the oppressive atmosphere and Offred's resistance actions, creating an action-oriented plot. The film's conclusive ending, escaping Gilead and murdering the Commander, removes the ambiguity of Offred's fate and thematic questions about historical memory, satisfying the narrative need for resolution in Hollywood films. The cinematic adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* features a linear, action-oriented plot with a clear beginning, middle, and end, focusing on rebellion and

oppression. This approach simplifies the novel's character dynamics and psychological depth, but sacrifices the novel's complex, introspective layers for a more accessible narrative.

The analysis of the plot structure shifts reveals that the novel's film adaptation contains modulation, modification, and mutation of Perdikaki's (2016) model. By shifting from the introspective, psychological terror of the novel to a more visual and action-focused tone, the film modulates the plot. In order to fit into the cinematic medium, which depends more on visual clues and exchanges than internal conversation, the novel's strong internal monologues and contemplative style are modulated. The film modulates the plot into a chronological, simple development in place of the novel's non-linear structure, which alternates between current events and jumbled flashbacks of Offred's previous life. While keeping important plot points from the book, this modulation gives viewers who are not familiar with Atwood's writing a more manageable framework. The film modifies the profundity of several character interactions, notably Offred's bond with Nick, transforming it into a more explicit love tale instead of the intricate, ambiguous relationship depicted in the novel. This modification introduces a traditional romantic subplot, enhancing the story's appeal to mass audiences while diminishing the intricacy of Offred's motivations. The film changes from Offred's internal reflections and covert defiance to overt manifestations of resistance and tangible relationships, so modifying the conveyance of the story's ideas. The film modifies Offred's journey by prioritizing physical actions over mental resistance, showcasing explicit acts of rebellion rather than subtle psychological conflicts. The film gives Offred a more conclusive escape, changing the novel's ending. The book leaves her fate unresolved, but the film's ending provides closure, likely to meet Hollywood's narrative conflict resolution tradition. This mutation changes the story's tone and theme, departing from Atwood's critique of historical memory and limiting spectator interpretation. The novel's Historical Notes epilogue questions memory and history from a far future Gilead. This epilogue is removed from the film, mutating its structure and deleting criticism on how future generations may remember or misinterpret authoritarian regimes. The novel's meta-narrative critique is reduced by focusing on Offred's current perspective without historical context.

Narrative Techniques

Temporal sequence (the story's narrative time) and presentation (the story's communication method) are two subcategories of narrative techniques (Perdikaki, 2017a, p. 6). *The Handmaid's Tale* and its 1990 film adaptation differ in their temporal sequences. The novel uses a non-linear structure, moving between Offred's present life as a Handmaid in Gilead and fragmented flashbacks of her past, revealing details about the regime's rise, Offred's life before Gilead, and her relationships with her husband, Luke, and daughter. This creates a sense of mystery and mirrors Offred's fractured sense of self. The film, on the other hand, follows a linear, chronological structure, starting with Offred's capture and indoctrination at the Red Center, followed by her life in the Commander's household, and ending with her escape. This straightforward sequence makes the plot easier to follow but removes the gradual, suspense-building nature of the novel's timeline.

Atwood's novel depicts Offred's mental anguish with complicated chronological layering. The novel's timelessness and her inability to separate past, present, and imagined futures mirror her psychological state. In contrast, the film presents Offred's recollections in brief flashbacks, reducing her emotional sense of time. The novel's "Historical Notes" epilogue, set hundreds of years after Gilead, questions Offred's story and Gilead's savagery. However, the film focuses on Offred's immediate Gilead experience, diminishing its thematic depth. The film's simplified framework makes it more action-packed, but the novel's non-linear structure and ambiguous finale add psychological depth, suspense, and thematic ambiguity. The novel's flashbacks and fractured memories reveal Offred's inner life.

The film's modulation involves a linear structure, retaining key events from the novel but altering the narrative's pacing and emotional impact. The film emphasizes visual storytelling over internal reflection,

capturing Offred's experiences but losing the nuanced psychological depth of the novel. Its action-oriented portrayal of time is more accessible for audiences, while modulating the novel's use of time to explore Offred's psyche. The film modifies Gilead's backstory, reducing the complexity of the narrative and shifting focus to Offred's struggles. The novel's gradual revelation of society's transformation into a theocracy builds suspense and horror. The film modifies this backstory into brief flashbacks, reducing the depth of understanding and shifting the focus from societal transformation to Offred's immediate struggles. The linear timeline of the film modifies character interactions, making them more explicit but less nuanced. The film mutates the narrative by omitting the "Historical Notes" epilogue, shifting the timeline to the future and reflecting on Gilead's history through a contemporary lens. This shifts the narrative's focus, eliminating the commentary on memory and historical interpretation central to the novel. The film presents a more isolated story about Offred's immediate experiences, rather than a broader critique of how history is recorded and understood. The temporal sequence is mutated by providing a definitive ending with Offred's escape, contrasting with the novel's ambiguous conclusion. This mutation affects the audience's perception of hope and resistance, suggesting a clear path to freedom. The film modulates the timeline to create a more linear and accessible structure, modifies the backstory and character depth for clarity, and mutates key elements like the epilogue and ending to create a different interpretive framework. These shifts underscore the distinctive narrative capabilities of each media while also illustrating the diverse thematic highlights that emerge from their respective temporal approaches.

As for the presentation, in the novel, Offred's story is presented from her first-person perspective, allowing readers to understand her psychological struggles, fears, and desires intimately. The use of stream-of-consciousness techniques and introspective monologues adds layers to her character, making her experiences personal and relatable. However, the film adopts a third-person perspective, focusing on Offred's actions and interactions without delving deeply into her internal thoughts. This shift creates a sense of distance from Offred's character, making it harder for audiences to engage with her internal conflicts. The lack of a voiceover or internal monologue limits the audience's access to Offred's psyche. Atwood employs a non-linear narrative structure, integrating frequent flashbacks and fragmented memories to enhance the psychological depth of the story. However, the film relies on a more linear narrative structure, simplifying the timeline and sacrificing some of the suspense and emotional weight from the gradual unfolding of Offred's backstory. This results in a more straightforward but less nuanced narrative experience. The novel's character development is nuanced and complex, as readers gain insight into Offred's relationships through her inner thoughts and reflections. The dynamic between Offred, the Commander, and Serena Joy is deeply explored, revealing layers of jealousy, power struggle, and emotional conflict. The film presents character interactions more straightforwardly, prioritizing dialogue and visible tension over internal complexity. The emotional depth of Offred's connections, particularly with the Commander and Serena, is less explored, resulting in a portrayal that may lack the same level of complexity and ambiguity as the novel.

The novel uses a first-person perspective to create a psychological connection with Offred, while the film uses a third-person perspective, modulating the narrative experience. This modulation changes the audience's engagement with Offred from a subjective, intimate experience to an observational one, making it more challenging for viewers to connect deeply with her internal struggles. The novel uses a non-linear structure with flashbacks to reveal Offred's past and her freedom erosion. The film adopts a linear narrative, simplifying the storytelling but modifying the complexity of Offred's backstory and character unfolding. This modification affects pacing and emotional buildup, resulting in a straightforward narrative lacking the suspense and depth provided in the novel. The film adaptation has mutated character development by reducing internal monologues and emphasizing external interactions. The film's reliance on dialogue and visual cues may simplify these characteristics, leading to a less nuanced understanding of the motivations

and complexities. A significant mutation in the film adaptation is the omission of the “Historical Notes” epilogue, shifting the narrative’s focus and removing the meta-narrative commentary on Gilead’s society. The film provides a definitive ending with Offred’s escape, contrasting the novel’s ambiguous conclusion. This change shifts the thematic focus from the complexity of oppression and resistance to a simplified notion of triumph, affecting viewers’ interpretation of Offred’s journey and the implications of her story.

Characterization

The differences in characterization between the novel and its film adaptation significantly affect how characters are portrayed and understood. The novel offers profound psychological depth and intricacy, facilitating a detailed examination of characters and their interactions. The film, in contrast, simplifies these portrayals, leading to more direct and unsophisticated characterizations. Differences like these influence audience involvement with the characters’ descriptions and the overarching themes of oppression and resistance in Gilead. Furthermore, the film omits many characters in the novel, including Offred’s mother, Luke, Luke and Offred’s daughter, and Aunt Elizabeth, while all remaining characters have been altered. Perdikaki defines characterization shift as the interpretation of characters inside the fictional story and the evolving interpersonal interactions among them (2017a, p. 7). This definition suggests that the shifts in interpersonal relationships among the characters can be examined and classified within this category.

The novel offers deep psychological insights into its characters, especially Offred, via her first-person narration. Her introspections, recollections, and sentiments offer profound insight into her motivations, apprehensions, and aspirations. The secondary characters, including the Commander and Serena Joy, are intricately developed, with their complexity examined through Offred’s perspectives. The film adaptation streamlines character representations, depending on external actions and speech instead of interior monologues. This shift results in a more surface-level comprehension of characters, with Offred’s psychological complexity diminished in the film. Offred’s agency and perseverance are crucial to her character in the novel, as her internal conflicts and contemplations underscore her need for autonomy and resistance against the repressive dictatorship of Gilead. In the film, Offred’s agency is curtailed, rendering her more passive and reactive, which may result in the audience viewing her as less empowered than in the novel. The novel examines Offred’s relationships with pivotal people, including the Commander and Serena Joy, highlighting complex power dynamics, envy, and emotional turmoil. The film depicts these interactions with greater simplicity, frequently emphasizing action and speech rather than psychological intricacies. In the film, Nick is portrayed as more direct and resembles a typical romantic comedy love interest, although in the novel, he is depicted as reserved and mysterious. In the novel secondary characters Moira and Janine are well-developed. Moira represents rebellion and resistance to Gilead’s persecution. The novel explores different responses to dictatorship through Janine’s character, who shows how indoctrination and trauma affect Gilead women. These supplementary characters lack depth in the film adaptation. In contrast to the novel, Moira’s resistance is not as pronounced as it is in the novel. While Offred meets Moira in the Red Center in the film, they have known each other since youth in the novel. Janine’s plot is simplified, limiting her character development and Gilead’s women’s experiences. Rita and Cora are relatively peripheral characters in *The Handmaid's Tale*, serving as maids within the household. Despite their limited roles, they are intricately connected to Offred and the events of the narrative. Their presence plays a significant part in shaping the domestic dynamics of Gilead, influencing Offred's experiences and interactions within the regime.

The novel explores Offred’s character through her internal monologues, allowing readers to experience her thoughts, fears, and desires directly. However, the film shifts the narrative to a more external focus, modulating Offred’s inner life and highlighting her emotional struggles and resilience. The novel presents relationships with symbolic meaning, particularly between Offred and the Commander, conveying exploita-

tion and ambiguous intimacy. The film's portrayal retains these core relationships but loses some of the symbolic depth, making them more straightforward and less layered. This modulation of the novel and film portrayals affects audiences' perceptions of Offred's character. The novel features complex characters Offred, the Commander, and Serena Joy, each with their own motivations and internal conflicts. The Commander's character is explored in depth, revealing layers of guilt and vulnerability. However, the film modifies these characters in a more straightforward manner, with Offred's character being less nuanced and the Commander appearing as an oppressor archetype. Serena Joy is modified as a younger, friendly suburban housewife, occasionally upset at a particular ceremony. In addition to abovementioned characterization shifts, mutation is also observed in the film adaptation. Offred's mother has been omitted in the film. Luke and Offred's daughter and Luke have been altered significantly.

Setting

Temporal setting and spatial setting are the two subcategories that fall under the general term setting. It pertains to the period of time and place that the story takes place (Perdikaki, 2017a, p. 8). The film's temporal and spatial setting is established in the opening shot, accompanied by a caption that reads, "Once upon a time in the recent future, a country went wrong. The country was called The Republic of Gilead". This introduction reflects the novel's exploration of the blurred boundaries between reality and fiction, past and present, as well as truth and fantasy. By situating the narrative in a near-future dystopia, the film underscores the tension between the imagined world of Gilead and its connections to contemporary societal concerns. The phrase "Once upon a time" evokes a sense of a mythical past and frames the narrative as a story, while the addition of "a country went wrong" transforms it into an allegorical reflection. This combination offers a subtle critique, likening the Republic of Gilead to the United States by suggesting a dystopian trajectory where societal values have been corrupted. The use of this narrative structure encourages the viewer to interpret the rise of Gilead as a cautionary tale, drawing parallels between the fictional regime and potential real-world political and social missteps. The setting of the film, which spans the time between the recent past and the near future, serves both as a warning of a sci-fi apocalyptic vision and as a commentary on contemporary issues. In the novel, Gilead's dystopian society is portrayed through Offred's introspective reflections and detailed observations, offering a complex, multi-layered understanding of her oppressive environment. The film, while lacking the same interior reflections that deepen the viewer's connection to the novel, uses cinematography and set design to visually convey the repressive nature of Gilead. The film's somber architecture and the Handmaids' distinctive attire symbolize the harshness of the regime, though they may not elicit the same emotional intensity as the novel's more nuanced internal narrative.

Time is an important part of the setting of the novel, as Offred remembers her existence before Gilead, which opens up a world of more diversity and freedom. A more thorough examination of how the environment has evolved and how it affects people is made possible by the fluidity of time. With an emphasis on Offred's current experiences in Gilead, the film takes on a more linear temporal structure. Although there are flashbacks, they are less frequent and detailed than in the novel, giving the reader a more immediate but less complex knowledge of the setting. This could restrict the investigation of how the environment develops character relationships and identities across time. Important sites including the Red Center, the church, and the Commander's home are all part of the novel's setting and are essential to the plot and character arcs. The film's portrayal of these locales, however, may be less comprehensive, as the visual representation may not fully capture their thematic significance within the characters' storylines. As a result, the deeper thematic resonance of these spaces could be diminished, limiting the audience's understanding of their importance in the narrative. This reduction in complexity may affect the overall emotional and symbolic impact that these settings have in conveying the central themes of the story.

Offred's thoughts and reflections filter Gilead's setting within the novel. Readers witness the regime via her recollections and emotions, giving the Commander's residence and Red Center dimension. Modulation in the film involves turning Offred's reflections into color-coded apparel, bleak interiors, and guarded streets. These modulations move the story from internal to external, yet Gilead remains oppressive. Offred's mental state and indications of invisible oversight give the narrative a sense of surveillance. The film adds guards, security checks, and patrols to surveillance. This visual modulation increases intimidation, making Gilead's control more obvious without changing surveillance. Offred's recollections of the pre-Gilead era are interwoven throughout the novel, establishing a setting that is both historical and contemporary. Readers may completely understand the shift from freedom to repression because of this intricate chronological layering. This is modified in the film by cutting down on flashbacks and emphasizing the current, Gilead-dominated scene. By making the plot more immediate and linear, this decision streamlines the chronological structure and reduces the comparative depth between the past and present. The film adaptation of Gilead has made significant changes, including a loss of psychological dimensions in the setting. The novel's spaces, such as the Commander's house, the Red Center, and the Wall, are infused with Offred's emotional responses and memories, adding layers to each setting. However, the film's physical focus mutates these spaces into more straightforward representations, reducing the depth of its impact on Offred's inner life. The film also focuses almost exclusively on Gilead's present, with minimal flashbacks, limiting the sense of transformation from a freer world to a repressive state. The novel presents Gilead as a wide-reaching society with a strict social order, while the film narrowly focuses on Offred's immediate world, mutating the scope of Gilead from a vast, multi-layered society to a more confined, isolated series of settings. This mutation can make Gilead seem less expansive and systematic, making it an immediate backdrop for the characters' experiences.

Conclusion

This study utilizes Perdiki's (2016) model for translation shifts to analyze the 1990 film adaptation of Atwood's dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. It focuses on narrative units that are independent of the medium, such as plot structure, narrative techniques, characterization, and setting. The study's findings indicate that each shift in the adaptation is influenced by commercial factors, beginning with the initial adaptation process and extending through decisions regarding the screenplay, director, and cast. The potential overlap of these shifts underscores the corporate nature of filmmaking, highlighting how commercial considerations shape the adaptation of the source material.

Adaptations reinterpret the original text, bringing new meanings to it, and their success depends on how well they stand on their own for audiences, regardless of whether they are familiar with the source material. The adaptation process involves maintaining the core essence of the original while allowing for variation, rather than direct imitation. In doing so, it represents both the original work and its transformation, adding to its artistic and cultural value. The balance between staying true to the original and introducing innovation is crucial for the adaptation's authenticity and its ability to connect with a wide range of audiences.

In exploring adaptation shifts and the concept of inspirational translation, it becomes evident that intersemiotic translation from novel to screen entails significant deviations from the original text, despite the film being inspired by the written work. The proposed adaptation model serves as a framework for analyzing film adaptations as intersemiotic translations, converting text into visual representation. This model integrates theoretical concepts from Translation Studies, Adaptation Studies, and narratology, which collectively inform the descriptive categories used in the analysis. These categories encompass narrative elements that are present in both literary and cinematic forms of storytelling, thus providing a robust methodological approach for examining adaptation process. This indicates that the model can be applied to a wide range of adapted narratives, as fundamental storytelling elements, such as plot, with its dual

structure, characters, and setting, are central to both literary and cinematic forms. These core components are essential to the narrative structure in both mediums, making the model highly effective for analyzing the shifts that occur during the adaptation process. Employing this model to analyze adaptation shifts enables a more in-depth understanding of the diverse alterations and changes that occur throughout the adaptation process. It further offers critical insights into how key elements are reshaped when transitioning from one medium to another. This approach shifts the focus from the question of what must or needs to be conveyed in an adaptation, a central concern in Adaptation Studies for many years, towards examining the novel methods and devices used to communicate an existing narrative. It facilitates an analysis of how adaptations retain core elements of the original narrative. At the same time, it examines how medium-specific variations introduce innovation while maintaining continuity. Analyzing an adaptation through the categories and shift types outlined in the proposed model facilitates a deeper understanding of the adaptation shifts, both at the textual level and in terms of the broader narrative conveyed by the adaptation. Perdikaki's (2016) adaptation analysis model treats the source text and its adaptation as distinct creative entities, each utilizing its own techniques to present a narrative that is both familiar and unique.

The adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* from novel to screen shows the complicated nature of converting a literary dystopia into a visual medium. The shifts in setting, characterization, narrative technique, and plot structure point out the problems as well as advantages inherent in adaptation. The film modifies and simplifies the novel's rich storyline and profound psychological investigation of Offred's inner world, enabling the story to resonate with audiences in a more immediate and visually compelling manner. The 1990 film adaptation, through modulation, modification, and mutation, simplifies Atwood's complex representation of Gilead into a simpler yet authoritative illustration of control and resistance. Ultimately, although some symbolic depth and temporal aspects of the novel have been reduced in the film adaptation, it may serve as useful commentary on authoritarianism and identity. It underscores the versatility of *The Handmaid's Tale*'s fundamental themes across several mediums, demonstrating that, despite alterations in narrative technique, the story's impact is still present. This case study illustrates how adaptation may both constrain and enhance a story, while highlighting that each medium provides unique, yet complimentary, methods for engaging with and comprehending fiction.

The analysis in this study underscores the adaptability of *The Handmaid's Tale*'s central themes across different mediums, illustrating that, despite shifts in narrative technique, the fundamental impact of the story remains intact. By examining the transition from text to film, the study reveals how adaptations can both constrain and enhance a narrative. While certain aspects of the original text may be altered or omitted in the adaptation process, new methods of storytelling and visualization in film provide fresh ways to engage with the themes and characters. The study further emphasizes that each medium, whether literary or cinematic, offers its own unique set of tools for storytelling, allowing for distinct modes of interaction with the audience. These mediums, while different in their techniques, complement one another by offering varied perspectives and avenues for deeper understanding. Ultimately, this exploration demonstrates that adaptation, when carefully executed, has the potential to enrich the original work, adding layers of meaning while maintaining the core essence of the narrative.

Further research could involve conducting similar analyses with a range of diverse adaptations to assess the broader applicability of the model. By exploring how the model operates across different genres, mediums, and narrative structures, such studies could provide deeper insights into the adaptability of the framework. This would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of its potential to analyze and compare the nuances of adaptation processes across a wide spectrum of works, further refining its utility in Adaptation Studies.



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