STRATEGIES USED IN TRANSLATION OF INTERLINGUAL SUBTITLING (ENGLISH TO PERSIAN)

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Abstract

This study was an attempt to identify the interlingual strategies in English to Persian subtitling and to determine their frequency. Contrary to most countries, subtitling is a new field in Iran. The study, a corpus-based, comparative, descriptive, non-judgmental analysis of English-Persian parallel corpus, comprised English audio scripts of movies in different genres with Persian subtitles. The theoretical framework was based on Gottlieb's (1992) classification. The results indicated that all strategies proposed by Gottlieb were applicable to the corpus with some degree of variation in distribution among different film genres. The most frequently used strategy was transfer at 54.06%; the least frequently used strategies were transcription and decimation both at 0.81% respectively. In the final stage the researcher concluded that film genre played a crucial role in the variation of used strategy which can be of great use value for decision makers to include this issue in training of future subtitlers and also academic training of translators.

Key Words: audiovisual translation (AVT), Interlingual (Diagonal) Subtitling, Intralingual (Vertical) Subtitling, subtitle, translation strategy

Özet

Bu çalışmada İngilizce'den Farsça'ya yapılan altyazı çevirilerinde uygulanan dillerarası stratejiler ve bunların kullanım sıklığı ortaya konmaya çalışılmıştır. Birçok ülkenin aksine, altyazı çevirisi İran'da yeni bir alandır. Bütünceye dayalı, betimleyici, karşılaştırmalı ve önyargısız bir analiz içeren bu çalışmada, farklı türlerde filmlerin İngilizce ses kayıtlarıyla Farsça altyazıları karşılaştırılmıştır. Kuramsal çerçeve olarak, Gottlieb'in (1992) sınıflandırmasından yola çıkılmıştır. Elde edilen sonuçlar, dağılımları açısından film türlerine göre belirli bir ölçüde farklılık göstermekle birlikte, Gottlieb'in öne sürdüğü tüm stratejilerin, bu çalışmadaki bütünceye uygulanabileceğini ortaya koymuştur. En sık kullanılan strateji %54.06 ile aktarım, en az kullanılan stratejiler ise %0.81 ile çevriyazı ve örnek seyreltme (desimasyon) stratejileridir. Yapılan değerlendirmede, film türünün kullanılan stratejilerin seçiminde önemli payı olduğu ortaya konmuş, bu sonucun altyazı çevirmenliği eğitiminde ve akademik çeviri eğitiminde gözetilmesinin büyük yararı olacağı sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: görsel işitsel çeviri, dillerarası altyazı çevirisi, diliçi altyazı çevirisi, altyazı, çeviri stratejisi

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I. Introduction

Translation has always been a central part of communication. Translation Studies (TS), as a field of research has developed over the last two decades, during which screen translation has slowly emerged as a new area (O'Connell; cited in Kuhiwczak & Littau 2007: 120). Audiovisual Translation (AVT) is a new field in TS. The most widespread forms of AVT are *Subtitling* and *Dubbing*. Subtitling is visual, involving the super imposition of written text onto the screen. Dubbing, which makes use of acoustic channel in screen translation, is oral (Baker & Hochel; cited in Baker 1998:74). Díaz Cintas pointed out that, the mode that has undergone greatest growth is subtitling. It has many advantages; it is the quickest method, and also the most economical to implement. (Cited in Anderman & Rogers 2003: 199).

Until quite recently, TS concentrated on difficulties associated with the translation of the written word. According to Ivarsson (2001), for a long time there was very little literature on subtitling. Digital technology has given us all kinds of modern equipment. According to Sánchez, "The advent of DVD and digital has meant an increase in subtitled film and television" (cited in Orero 2004: 12). In Gottlieb's terms, these DVDs provide options for either vertical (same language) use for the hearing impaired or diagonal (different language) subtitling (Gottlieb 1994: 104; cited in Zatlin 2005: 124).

Dubbing has a long history in Iran; however, young people have recently favored subtitled films, and universities have begun to include it as a subject for study in their curricula. Subtitling is the focus of several academic conferences every year.

The most important problem regarding subtitling in Iran is the lack of any responsible organization and educated professional subtitlers at work. Furthermore, many of the DVDs are subtitled by special software without human interference. Therefore, the present paper attempts to remind the film industry the need for educated and learned subtitlers to achieve the required improvement in this field. Subtitling in general will never reach its high standard as long as it remains outside the realm of academic investigation and research. In addition to its pedagogical implications, it pinpoints the strategies that have been of great use for the previous translators. This study aims to call the attention of decision-makers to include subtitling in academic translation training programs. Subtitling is one of the newly growing interests in Iran, and English films are presented in original language with either English (intralingual) or Persian (interlingual) subtitling.

II. Review of the related literature

An increasing part of the language in the media worldwide is translated from English (Gottlieb; cited in Gambier & Gottlieb 2001: 249). In technical terms, the translation of films is called language transfer. Luyken commented that 'Audiovisual language transfer' denotes the process by which a film or television program is made comprehensible to the target audience that is unfamiliar with the original source language (cited in Sponholz 2003). There exist several forms of audiovisual language transfer. The main forms of language transfer are "subtitling" and "dubbing". Subtitling is defined as 'supplementing the original voice soundtrack by adding written text on screen' and dubbing is 'replacing the original voice soundtrack with another voice in another language' (O'Connell 2000: 169). Because of the larger costs of dubbing, subtitling has become a popular way of dealing with the language problem. "The role of subtitles is to facilitate access to audiovisual products in a foreign language" (Kapsaskis 2008: 42). There are several definitions of subtitling by various scholars. The word subtitling is defined by Gottlieb as "the rendering in a different language of verbal message in

filmic media, in the shape of one or more lines of written text, presented on the screen in synch with the original verbal message" (cited in Orero 2004: 86). <u>Subtitling is defined in Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997: 161) as "the process of providing synchronized captions for film and television dialogue".</u>

Traditionally, there existed two types of subtitles: *interlingual* subtitles, which imply transfer from a SL to a TL and *intralingual* subtitles, where there is no change of language (Díaz Cintas; cited in Anderman & Rogers 2003: 199). According to Gottlieb, subtitling has been used since 1929, when the first talkies reached Europe (cited in Baker 1998: 244). According to Sponholz (2003) "subtitles evolved out of the intertitles, which were used as devices to convey the dialogue of the actors to audience." According to Karamitroglou (2000), an 'intertitle' was a replacement shot for a part of a film that contained verbal information in the original language (p.6). Sponholz (2003) stated that text was printed on cardboard, filmed and inserted between sequences of the film. The invention of sound film in 1927 led to a gradual disappearance of intertitles and the problem of language transfer took on new dimensions; as a result, dubbing was born. However, subtitling as a cheaper method of language transfer developed further. The technique of inserting subtitles onto the film was improved over the years.

All types of translation have its specific set of constraints; for sure, screen translation is not an exception. What makes subtitling different from other types of translation is that it involves both technical and contextual constraints. Gottlieb (1992) uses a different terminology, stating that a subtitler is faced with formal (quantitative) and textual (qualitative) constraints. Textual constraints are those imposed on the subtitles by the visual context of the film, whereas formal constraints are the space factors (a maximum of 2 lines and 35 characters) and the time factor (cited in Spanakaki, 2007). According to Schwarz (2003), the main problem in subtitling is caused by the difference between the speed of the spoken language and the speed in reading; both the speed of the spoken language and the speed in reading require a reduction of the text.

According to Sponholz (2003), although interlingual subtitles are always perceived as a supplement to film, they are the most cost-effective audiovisual language transfer mode. Sponholz (2003), also mentioned that there are some advantages for watching subtitled foreign language programs. First, watching subtitled programs fosters foreign language acquisition. He continued that, such programs improve reading skills. However, these benefits only apply if the subtitles meet the quality requirements. According to Gottlieb, interlingual subtitling having societal and language-political implications, is instrumental in improving reading skills, boosting foreign language skills, facilitating easy and cheap international program exchange and cementing the dominance of English (Gottlieb; cited in Orero 2004: 87).

As stated by Taylor (2000), Henrik Gottlieb's translation strategies (161-170) for the Subtitling of Film are as follows:

1. Expansion is used when the original requires an explanation because of some cultural

 nuance not retrievable in the target language.

2. Paraphrase is resorted to in cases where the phraseology of the original cannot be reconstructed in the same syntactic way in the target language.

3. Transfer refers to the strategy of translating the source text completely and accurately.
4. Imitation maintains the same forms, typically with names of people and places.

5. Transcription is used in those cases where a term is unusual even in the source text, for example the use of a third language or nonsense language.

6. Dislocation is adopted when the original employs some sort of special effect, e.g. a silly song in a cartoon film, where the translation of the effect is more important than the content.

7. Condensation would seem to be the typical strategy used, that is the shortening of the text in the least obtrusive way possible, but as we shall see later, this is not necessarily the case.

8. Decimation is an extreme form of condensation where, perhaps for reasons of discourse speed, even potentially important elements are omitted.

9. Deletion refers to the total elimination of parts of a text.

10. Resignation describes the strategy adopted when no translation solution can be found and meaning is inevitably lost.

III. Methodology

The study was a corpus-based analysis of subtitling strategy conducted on the comparative, descriptive, non-judgmental procedure which was carried out on the English-Persian parallel corpus with 932 frames. The corpus comprised 100-minute-film dialogue in English and 100-minute-Persian subtitle (200 minutes altogether) which was selected from the second 20 minutes of each film for the purpose of randomization.

The corpus consisted of two elements: English audio script of the five English feature films along with their Persian translation in the form of subtitles. The data was gathered by analyzing the Persian subtitles of five selected American films, which were among the different genres and by different directors to have a richer diversity of the topic and content which would in turn provide a larger variety of translation and subtitling strategies. Furthermore, the quality of subtitles was above average, and there existed very few mistakes compared to other English films with Persian subtitles available in the market.

1) *The Young Victoria* directed in 2008 by Jean-Marc Vallée 2) *August Rush* directed in 2007 by Kirsten Sheridan 3) *The Grudge 2* directed in 2006 by Takashi Shimizu 4) *Big Fish* directed in 2004 by Tim Burton 5) *A Cinderella Story* directed in 2004 by Mark Rosman.

To analyze the data, the researcher used the classification of interlingual subtitling strategies proposed by Gottlieb's (1992) as the theoretical framework.

In order to obtain the required information, the researcher followed a three-step procedure; viewing the films, transcribing the English utterances of film and the Persian subtitles of each film and finally, determining the strategies used in subtitling according to the aforementioned framework. The basic unit of a film is a frame; consequently, the unit of analysis in this study was considered to be a frame. A frame is defined as a word or a stretch of words in the form of subtitle which appeared together for a length of time on screen and disappeared together before another frame appeared.

IV. Findings and Discussion

After analyzing the data, descriptive tables were presented for each film under study, which specified the frequency and percentage of the ten subtitling strategies based on the abovementioned model.

Table 1 *Frequency and percentage of different interlingual subtitling strategies in the five films*

Strategy	frequency percentage	The Young Victoria	August Rush	Big Fish	The Grudge 2	A Cinderella Story
Transfer	frequency	190	123	120	65	174
	percentage	72.52	45.06	53.57	47.1	50.29
Imitation	frequency	47	35	25	16	44
	percentage	17.94	12.82	11.16	11.59	12.72
Paraphrase	frequency	3	35	21	18	43
	percentage	1.15	12.82	9.38	13.05	12.43
Deletion	frequency	0	34	19	17	22
	percentage	0	12.45	8.48	12.32	6.36
Expansion	frequency	1	9	13	9	43
	percentage	0.38	3.3	5.8	6.52	12.43
Condensation	frequency	13	11	9	6	5
	percentage	4.96	4.03	4.02	4.35	1.44
Dislocation	frequency	1	10	6	3	10
	percentage	0.38	3.66	2.68	2.17	2.89
Resignation	frequency	4	10	5	0	4
	percentage	1.53	3.66	2.23	0	1.15
Decimation	frequency	1	5	3	1	0
	percentage	0.38	1.83	1.34	0.73	0
Transcription	frequency	2	1	3	3	1
	percentage	0.76	0.37	1.34	2.17	0.29

Table 2 *Frequency and percentage of strategies used in the five films*

Type of Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Transfer	672	54.06
Imitation	167	13.44
Paraphrase	120	9.65
Deletion	92	7.4
Expansion	75	6.03
Condensation	44	3.54
Dislocation	30	2.41
Resignation	23	1.85
Transcription	10	0.81
Decimation	10	0.81

Analysis of the data gathered in the present paper reveals that the subtitlers of the films under study have applied different strategies to transfer the expressions of the original films. These strategies were as follows:

Transfer constituted the main part, i.e. 54.06% of the strategies in this study. Transfer conveyed the full expression, and it constituted the adequate rendering of neutral discourse; therefore, the researcher believed that Iranian subtitlers did their best in transferring dialogues to Persian in the most understandable and natural way as possible. Imitation equated to 13.44% of the whole strategy instances. Imitation constituted the identical expression, equivalent rendering of proper nouns, international greetings, etc. Although imitation stood in the second rate, it should be admitted that due to the use of this strategy in the case of the proper names and some other international words, it didn't have a fixed position in the hierarchy of all corpus and its use is fully dependent on the dialogues between actors and the intimacy among them. Paraphrase, formed 9.65% of the translation strategies in this study. It indicated the altered expression, adequate rendering of non-verbal language-specific phenomena. Despite the similarities in concepts and ideas between English and Persian, the phraseology of these languages in so many cases needed to be reconstructed in order to have the same impression and understanding in the target viewer. Paraphrase could be corresponded to a 'sense for sense' translation rather than a literal one. Through the use of paraphrase, the translator tried to express the meaning of the speech using different words, to achieve greater clarity. In some cases this strategy was used together with other strategies like condensation or expansion. Deletion formed 8.54% of the translation strategies; it was used to deal with non-verbal content, repetition, filler words and tag questions and in some cases swear words which were not common in target language or target culture. Although it might affect semantic or stylistic content, it could be omitted considering the norm of the target society. Deletions in the case of repetition and tag questions were used to enhance the speaker's message conveyance. In other cases, deletion was used in cases of filler words without achieving the same meaning. Subtitle is a written form of film dialogues and speech occurs more rapidly than written form, therefore, it didn't seem unlikely that deletion is used quite largely as a subtitling strategy. Expansion which accounted for 6.03% of the strategies constituted the expanded expression, adequate rendering of culture-specific references and occurred in cases where

due to a cultural gap, a smaller sequence of linguistic unit was expanded to a larger sequence to be fully understandable to a foreigner. In a sense, expansion was considered as opposed to condensation. In some cases, it was used to make implicit information in the original more explicit through a kind of simplification. As English and Persian languages belonged to two different cultural backgrounds and different religions, it seemed natural to subtitlers to have the urge to use expansion as the subtitling strategy to deliver the message of the film fully and completely to the target audience. Condensation constituted 3.44% of the overall strategies used in this study. It consisted of the condensed expression, concise rendering of normal speech. Condensation like deletion was regarded as the frequent strategy in subtitling due to the space and time limits and quick appearance and disappearance of frames and mass of message needed to be delivered to the viewer. However, no important elements were deleted or disregarded but the condensed part could be easily understood by means of other channels such as soundtrack and vision. By adopting condensation, some of the redundancies were eliminated and thereby coherence was enhanced through a shorter sentence. According to some translation scholars such as Delabastita (1989), Kovačič (1998) and Schwarz (2002), condensation is the important peculiarity of subtitling. This may lead all to expect a large number of condensations in the findings of the study; however, this low percentage (3.44%) can indicate a conflict between theory and practice. Some of the other strategies such as omission and paraphrasing were used to make the expressions condensed. Dislocation formed 2.41% of the translation strategies in this study. It was used for different expressions, adjusted content of musical or visualized language-specific phenomena. Although there were no cases of song or cartoon in the corpus, the researcher encountered some cases where due to cultural or social gaps the effect of the dialogue uttered by the characters was more important than just translating the uttered words. However, the number of dislocation traced in the corpus was considerably low and subtitlers in most cases referred to paraphrasing the message rather than using dislocation as a subtitling strategy. Resignation constituted 1.85% of the translation strategies in this study. It was used in cases of differing expression, or content of untranslatable elements such as emotional expression . Each language has some forms to transfer the ideas and concepts to the members of its own society; however, due to some mismatches between phraseology and message conveyance among languages, there existed some cases when a language could not covey a message not because of the target language didn't have the tools to do so but because the need was not felt in that language to construct a word for that particular situation; thus, the subtitler due to the lack of time and space, as a crucial factor of audiovisual translation, preferred to disregard the message all together. Transcription only formed 0.81% of the translation strategies in this study. In cases of silly nicknames, foreign words, some filler words, or some person's pet words or even in cases of slips of the tongue which were usually considered nonsense in the source text, the subtitler resorted to the use of this strategy, which, despite constituting a small portion of the usage, was not abandoned all together from subtitling strategies. Decimation only formed 0.81% of the translation strategies used in this study. Transcription and decimation could together be placed in the equal stage in this hierarchy. Decimation was an extreme form of condensation, where perhaps for reasons of discourse speed, even potentially important elements were omitted. It constituted the abridged expression, reduced content of fast speech of same importance. However, it was distinguished from deletion or condensation because the cuts in decimation resulted in a loss of both semantic and stylistic content while the same condition didn't occur in the case of condensation or deletion. Besides the constraints of speed and time imposed on audiovisual translation, subtitlers are deemed to transfer information as much as possible to enhance the quality of understanding in the viewer.

V. Conclusion

The findings indicated that all strategies proposed by Gottlieb were applicable to English-Persian subtitling of English feature films with some degree of variation in the distribution of strategies among different film genres. Having mentioned that sometimes more than one strategy was used to translate a stretch of words in a frame, transfer with a distinguishably high rate of occurrence was the most frequently used strategy in all films. Moreover, paraphrase, deletion, imitation and expansion were placed in stages 2-5 and condensation, dislocation, transcription, decimation and resignation were placed in stages 6-10 with a slight variation in, 'The Grudge 2', 'Big Fish' and 'A Cinderella Story'. The situation in the two other films, namely 'The Young Victoria' and 'August Rush' was slightly different. In 'August Rush', transfer, paraphrase, imitation and deletion constituted strategies 1-4; however, due to the vast use of street talks and slang expressions in comparison to other films, condensation, dislocation, resignation, expansion, transcription and decimation were used to convey the message completely.

In the final stage the researcher concluded that film genre played a crucial role in the variation of used strategy which can be of great use and have profound value for decision makers to include this issue in training of future subtitlers and also academic training of translators. This claim might be much clearer in case of 'The Grudge 2', which due to its theme, the number of frames with subtitles was much fewer compared to other films. In the case of 'August Rush' with music and street talks, the use of strategies to render the meaning to the target audience was much greater. In the case of 'The Young Victoria' with its historic theme, the subtitler tried to transfer as much as possible via translating the film dialogues completely and accurately.

There exists a number of implications for the findings and results of the present study, which could be categorized in two groups: theoretical implication and pedagogical implications, each with its own unique characteristics. Research difficulties such as the atheoretical nature of the most existing AVT studies added to the difficulty of research in subtitling filed. "AVT has always been considered inferior to written literary translation, most probably because of the lack of cultural prestige in audiovisual mass media, compared to canonized literature." (Ballester 1995: 159); however, AVT like any other form of translation needs to overcome the communication barriers imposed by linguistic fragmentation. "It is the discovery of the hierarchy of factor (constraints, parameters) operated in translation processes, procedures, and products that constitute a major task for translation theory" (Even Zohar & Toury 1981: ix). The discovery of this hierarchy is also the task of AVT theory.

In case of pedagogical implications, the inclusion of different forms of AVT as an independent course of study in the curricula of the academic translators training is a new phenomena which is launched and developed in some other countries of the world, although it is still neglected in my home town, Iran. Students attending translation courses gained skills and language awareness that reflected itself in their performance. As a result, written translation and audiovisual translation are the two elements of language learning, and "subtitling calls for an enormous variety of skills that can be gained and improved through well staged activities" (Neves, cited in Orero 2004: 127). To be fully proficient in the field, the audiovisual translator needs to have basic knowledge in the making of media text. Through analyzing media texts, students break down a filmic text into its componental parts to discover the meaning. Different genres require different tools to analyze and discover the meaning. Once the meaning is discovered and the genre is specified, analyzing different strategies applied in subtitling would enhance interpretive competence in general and would broaden students' knowledge at all levels. Audiovisual materials could be used as a means of improving listening comprehension or even vocabulary learning. Script completion will develop listening skills and can

even serve as a version of spelling tests. While watching an audiovisual material, vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, slangs even intonation and other elements of film or cartoon can be understood with the aid of the extra informative layers that come with image and sound. With the aid of paralinguistic elements such as facial expressions, mime, tone, inferential meaning can be also understood. Summarizing and paraphrasing can be practised while producing effective subtitles. These are only some of the implications that AVT and particularly subtitling would have in the training of future AVT professionals and would-be subtitlers.

The fast increase in new translational activities requires translators to learn new skills. It would be satisfactory to include appropriate training at universities including AVT training courses in the same way as other areas of translation. In short, the researcher hopes that the finding of the present study would be useful for those interested in the topic, or professionals as well as those planning to start a career in AVT translation especially subtitling; and humbly call the attention of decision makers to include subtitling in academic translator training programs in Iran.

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