

Translating Movie Titles: Strategies Applied on Persian to English Cases

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Abstract

Movies are significant art forms that can potentially reflect life, culture, world, or thought of a society and present it to another society. Movie titles are the indivisible part of the movies. Translating movie titles is an arduous activity owing to its leading role in movies. Foreign movies are rapidly translated from English to Persian, while translation of Persian movies to English still has not received much attention. Therefore, the present study attempts to investigate the translation of 64 Persian movie titles with the intention of analyzing translation strategies used. The model proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet was used as the theoretical framework of this study to check up on each strategy used for translation of these 64 Persian to English movie titles. The results show that the most frequent translation strategy is literal translation in the translation of movie title from Persian to English, which is in line with the results of English to Persian, or English to Chinese translation of movie titles which were done in other studies.

Keywords: Movie titles; Vinay and Darbelnet; Translation strategies; Literal translation;

1. Introduction

Formerly, there are a lot of movies that are introduced to Iran. Movie is one of the most influential media in the world that potentially can introduce beliefs and culture of a group of people to another group. Title is the appellation given to the movies, which may behold the theme or plot of the movie; therefore, they are the indivisible part of the movies. Movie titles are the catchy phrases that are the first thing to spread about the upcoming movies, and an accepted translation may play a role in the successful release of a movie. This adds to the importance of the fact that translation of movie titles is a serious job which needs much effort.

In the translation of movie titles, much attention should be paid to the features of the title to see whether it is connected to the plot or characters of the movie. To do so, different translation strategies and procedures are introduced. Venuti (2000) states that adaptation is one of the most frequently used strategy in the translation of books and movie titles.

2. Literature Review

Newmark, in his *A textbook of translation*, distinguishes between 'descriptive titles', which describe the topic of the text, and 'allusive titles', which have some kind of referential or figurative relationship to the topic (1988, p. 57). He, then, suggests that for literary texts, a descriptive title should be 'literally' kept, and an allusive title should be preserved imaginatively. For non-literary texts, there is always a request for replacing allusive by descriptive titles, particularly if the allusive title is idiomatic or culturally bound.

There are many studies previously done in this area which have investigated the translation of movie titles. Ying (2007) investigated the translation of movie titles from English to Chinese by applying Newmark's translation procedures. Four main translation procedures identified were literal translation, transliteration, free translation and semantic translation. It was suggested that a translator could provide suitable translations to "get the audience a better understanding of the film itself" by integrating different translation strategies and procedures with a theory.

In another study, Yin (2009) studied the translation of movie titles from English to Chinese. In this study, techniques used in translating movie titles were classified into two groups: 1. transliteration, literal, and explication, which show respect for the original title, and 2. Adaptation and providing a new title, which get rid of the original title. As Yin proposed, a good movie title "should obey faithfulness, cultural awareness, combination of commercial and aesthetic effects."

Finally, Lotfollahi and Moinszadeh (2012) examined the translation procedures used for translating movie titles from English to Persian. They centered their study on 60 Hollywood movies of 2010 from English to Persian. The results of

their study show that the most frequently used strategies were literal translation and transliteration.

Iran, for long, has been a decent market for foreign movies. Many foreign movies are either dubbed or subtitled from English to Persian each year. However, the other way round, is just becoming a trend in three ways:

1. Movies which are dubbed into other languages, e.g. the Oscar-winning movie, a separation.
2. Movies which are subtitled into English, in which the title is translated as well.
3. No dubbing or subtling is done, just the producers of Persian movies, or sellers of Persian movies decide to include the English translation of their movie in order to advertise in worldwide and for presenting them to non-Persian speakers.

2.1 Translation Procedures

Vinay and Darbelnet's model of translation is set as the theoretical framework of this study. The following seven translation 'procedures' were identified by them, which are classified into two groups (Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies*, 2008, pp. 56-58):

- I. Direct translation:
 1. Borrowing: It happens when the source language word is transferred directly to the target language.
 2. Calque: It is "a special kind of borrowing" where the source language expression or structure is transferred literally.
 3. Literal translation: It is "word-for-word" translation and is common between languages of the same family and culture.
- II. Oblique translation:
 4. Transposition: It happens when one part of speech changes for another without changing the sense.
 5. Modulation: It changes the point of view and semantics of the source language.
 6. Equivalence: This is used when "languages describe the same situation by different stylistic or structural means" especially in translating proverbs and idioms.
 7. Adaptation: Where a situation in the source culture does not exist in the target culture, adaptation happens by changing the cultural reference.

3. Research Methodology

A list of 64 Persian movies, which has been translated from Persian to English, was made from the websites that introduce or sell these movies in foreign markets. Each title was compared with its English counterpart so as to define the type of translation strategy used. The theoretical framework of this study is Vinay and Darbelnet's model, since this is a comprehensive model in the translation of movie titles owing to its having the adaptation strategy; Venuti (2012) states that adaptation is one the most frequently used strategy in the translation of books and movie titles. All 64 items are studied to investigate what type of translation strategy is used, and then the items are categorized in groups. At last, frequency and percentage of each strategy is calculated separately to see which strategy is more frequently used.

4. Findings and Discussion

Vinay and Darbelnet's model can fall into two categories: 1. Showing respect for the original title (borrowing, calque, literal translation), and 2. Neglecting or alleviating the original title (transposition, modulation, equivalence, adaptation).

Table 1. Borrowing

In this strategy, both borrowed words from SL and transliteration form of SL words are considered. Mostly, movies which are proper names of people or places are treated in this category, e.g. نرگس which is translated as *Narges*.

1. لیلا /Leilā/	Leila
2. صنم /Sanam/	Sanam
3. حاجی واشینگتون /Hāji Washington/	Haji Washington
4. سارا /Sārā/	Sarah
5. کنای مانگا /Kānimāngā/	Kanimanga
6. زینت /Zinat/	Zinat
7. نرگس /Narges/	Narges
8. دنیا /Donyā/	Donya
9. پری /Parī/	Parī
10. هامون /Hāmūn/	Hamoon
11. سیاوش /Siāvash/	Siavash

Table 2. Literal translation

Most cases are related to this category. Literals translation or word-for-word translation is the most frequent strategy in translating this category. For instance, طعم گیلاس is translated literally as *Taste of cherry*, each word is translated; طعم is translated as *Taste* and *Cherry* is the equivalence of گیلاس. Other examples can be زندان زنان which is translated as *Women's Prison*, and گاو which is translated as *Cow*.

1. این یک فیلم نیست /in yek film nist/	This is not a film
2. کشتزار های سپید /Keshzārāhāye sepīd/	The white meadows
3. دایره مینا /Dāyere-ye minā/	Mina circle
4. تهران من حراج /Tehrān-e man harāj/	My Tehran for sale
5. شکارچی /Shekārchi/	The Hunter
6. زنان بدون مردان /Zanān bedūne mardān/	Women without men
7. آواز گنجشکها /āvāze gonjeshkhā/	The song of sparrows
8. چند کیلو خرما برای مراسم تدفین /chand kilū khormā barāye marāseme tadfīn/	A few kilos of date for a funeral
9. نیمه ماه /nime māh/	Half moon
10. درخت گلابی /Derakhte golābi/	The pear tree
11. دم مار /dom-e mār/	Snake's tail
12. مردان مشغول کار /mardān mashghul-e kār/	Men at work
13. آتش بس /ādash bas/	Ceasefire
14. تله /tale/	Trap
15. زیر درخت هلو /zire derakhte holu/	Under the peach tree
16. ایستگاه متروک /istgāhe martūk/	Deserted station
17. گاو /gāv/	Cow
18. بچه های بد /bachehāye bad/	Bad kids
19. دستفروش /dastforūsh/	peddler
20. پرده آخر /parde-ye ākhar/	The last act
21. خانه سیاه است /khāne siāh ast/	House is black
22. سیب /sīb/	Apple
23. طعم گیلاس /tam-e gilās/	Taste of Cherry
24. زندگی و دیگر هیچ /zendegi va digar hich/	Life and nothing more
25. به نام پدر /be nāme pedar/	In the name of Father
26. خانه دوست کجاست؟ /khāne dūst kojāst? /	Where's Friend's Home?
27. بیست انگشت /bist angosht/	20 Fingers
28. یک شب /yek shab/	One Night
29. بادکنک سفید /bādkonak-e sefid/	White Balloon
30. مستاجران /mostajerān/	Tenants
31. دوچرخه سوار /docharkhe savār/	Cyclist
32. دونده /davande/	Runner

33. خواب سفید / <i>khāb-e sefid</i> /	White Dream
34. خاکستری / <i>khākestari</i> /	Gray
35. زندان زنان / <i>zendāne zanān</i> /	Women's Prison
36. شازده احتجاب / <i>shāzde ehtejāb</i> /	Prince Ehtejāb
37. ارتفاع پست / <i>ertefā-e past</i> /	Low Heights
38. شام آخر / <i>shām-e akhar</i> /	Last Supper
39. مهمانان هتل آستوریا / <i>mehmānan-e hotel āsturiā</i> /	Guests of Hotel Astoria

Table 3. Modulation

Modulation refers to any change in the point of view and semantics of the source language; therefore, دستهای آلوده is translated as *Corrupted hands*, in which there is a slight change in the meaning of آلوده. *Pastry Girl*, too, refers to a girl who bakes pie and sweets, while the Persian word refers to a girl who sells them.

1. دستهای آلوده / <i>dasthāye ālude</i> /	Corrupted hands
2. دختر شیرینی فروش / <i>dokhtare shirini forūsh</i> /	Pastry Girl

Table 4. Adaptation

Adaptation deals with changing the cultural reference. چهارشنبه سوری does not exist in English, consequently, the translator has used *fireworks* instead. Twilight also refers to a new genre of movies which cannot be equivalent of سایه روشن. *Soul mate*, and *Weeping willow* are changes in the cultural references of هم نفس and بید مجنون respectively. *Tunes of Nostalgia* is name of a music album in TL which shows a change in the source reference.

1. چهارشنبه سوری / <i>chāhār shanbe sūri</i> /	Fireworks Wednesday
2. سایه روشن / <i>sāye roshan</i> /	Twilight
3. هم نفس / <i>ham nafas</i> /	Soul mate
4. بید مجنون / <i>bid-e majnūn</i> /	Weeping Willow
5. آهنگ غربت / <i>āhange ghorbat</i> /	Tunes of Nostalgia

Table 5. Equivalence

Equivalence refers to verbalization of the same situation by different stylistic or structural means in another language. This denotes two cases: firstly, translating proverbs and idioms which needs a total change in form and deviates totally from literal translation, and secondly, translation of ST item with some stylistic or structural changes which naturalizes the target equivalent. جدایی نادر از سیمین is translated as *A separation*, and توکیو بدون توقف is translated as *Tokyo, Non-stop*.

1. جدایی نادر از سیمین / <i>jodāie nāder az simin</i> /	A separation
2. آن سه نفر / <i>ān se nafar</i> /	Those Three
3. کپی برابر اصل / <i>kopi barābare asl</i> /	Certified copy
4. فوتبال زیر حجاب / <i>fūtbāl zire hejāb</i> /	Football under cover
5. دم صبح / <i>dam-e sobh</i> /	Day break
6. از کنار هم می گذریم / <i>az kenāre ham migozrim</i> /	Going by
7. توکیو بدون توقف / <i>Tokyo, bedūne tavagho</i> /	Tokyo, Non-stop

5. Results

It is obvious that 'literal translation' is the most frequent strategy with 39 occurrences. Frequency of each strategy is presented in Figure 1:

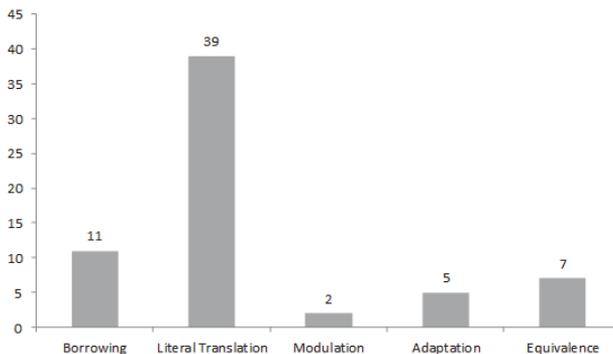


Figure 1. Frequency of translation strategies

Also the percentage of translation strategies used is presented in figure 2:

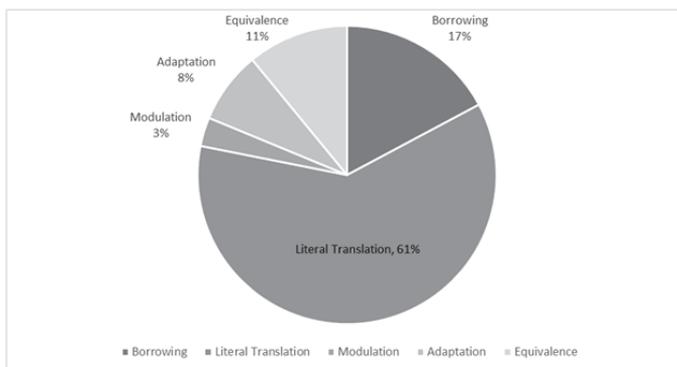


Figure 2. Percentage of Translation Strategies

The results show that preserving the source title is the best strategy, since the purpose of 'literal translation' with 61% and 'borrowing' with 17% is to stick to the source title. Strategies of oblique translation, equivalence with 11%, adaptation with 8%, and modulation with 3% also refers to those cases in which there is a deviation from the source title.

6. Concluding Remarks

Movie titles attract non-professional movie-goers, and to some extent the professional ones, in the first place. It may affect the box-office success of a movie. Therefore, a good translation of the source title plays the same role for the target audience.

The present study investigated the translation of 64 movies titles from Persian to English. Gathering movies which are subtitled, dubbed, or even had their titles translated was a demanding job itself, since there are few movies which are presented from Iran's cinema to the foreign markets. Vinay and Darbelnet's model was set as the theoretical framework of this study. The results show that literal translation is the most frequent strategy in translating movie titles from Persian to English.

There are similar studies on translation of movie titles from English to other languages. For the case of English to Persian, Lotfollahi and Moinzadeh (2012) found that literal translation and transliteration are the most frequent translation strategy. Ying (2007) found that literal translation is the most frequent strategy for English to Chinese movie titles translation. Yet, there was no previous study on Persian to English translation of movie titles. However, the result of this study is in line with the results of English to Persian or Chinese studies done previously.

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