

Machine Translation and Skopos Theory: Post-modernist Approach to Interlingual Translation

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Abstract—Translation, as an international channel of communication between different nations, should not be regarded as a simple matter, but should be contextualized as a multi-dimensional system of interconnected networks. Machine translation (MT), a modern and commercial approach to interlingual translation, has placed translators at the fingertips of the people who need quick and low-cost translations, but at the expense of appropriateness of the output. The commissioner and the translator, who determine the skopos and dimensions of adequacy according to the translation commission, play a pivotal role in the translation process. The purpose of this study is to show the efficiency of MT according to modern and capitalistic world's needs and expectations which influences the translation commissions in the movie industry. To this end, the English version of nine movies are sampled, and the Persian translations of certain parts of these movies, provided by MT, are selected and closely compared with the appropriate use of equivalents within the context of the movies. After data analysis, the appropriateness and accuracy of the translations will be discussed in terms of relativity and context dependence of the choice of translation strategy.

Index Terms—Machine Translation (MT), Skopos, commissioner, translation commission, adequacy

I. INTRODUCTION

Translation is a multi-dimensional activity which tries to connect people from two different cultural, social and lingual backgrounds. As Toury (1978) puts it “translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions”, (P.200). Translation of movies from one natural language into another is a field which, as modern as it may be, does still demand a great deal of attention. To this end certain problems arise.

Exchanging films and TV productions on an international level, has become increasingly asymmetrical. English is the all-dominant foreign language on the big screen, and even those major languages such as Spanish have lost their importance in comparison with English. In Europe, France, Denmark and Sweden are the only countries which have a domestic film production capable of keeping the United States and other imports below a market share of 80%. Meanwhile, audiences in the United States and the UK are rarely bothered with foreign-language productions. Like people almost all over the globe, they enjoy Anglophone productions. However, unlike all others, the American and British audiences do not often enjoy foreign-language productions, whether dubbed or subtitled. This phenomenon has created an ever increasing need for faster and less costly practices of translation.

The most fundamental criterion in business is the rule of supply and demand. Halliday (1990) notes that “when new demands are made on language... [and when] we are making language work for us in ways it never had to do before, it will have to become a different language in order to cope”, (P.82). The modern capitalistic expectations and demands on translation have made machine translation a suitable choice, especially, in commercial translation projects.

In any translation transaction, whether machine or human translation, there are two sides to this transaction. The first party to this transaction is the translation commissioner and the second party is the translator. The skopos of translation, pre-determined and negotiated by the commissioner and the translator, determines the adequacy of the translation output. As Vermeer (1989) states:

An expert must be able to say- and this implies both knowledge and a duty to use it- what is what.... The translator is such an expert. It is thus up to him to decide, for instance, what role a source text plays in his translation action. The decisive factor here is the purpose, the skopos, of the communication in a given situation. (P.174)

In this study, it is aimed to show that despite the use of inappropriate equivalents by the machine translation in the process of subtitling of the movies used as the corpus of the study, the translations have been deemed to be adequate by the translation commission.

II. A GLANCE AT MACHINE TRANSLATION (MT)

Translating of texts from one natural language into another using computer is known as machine translation (MT). It requires the precise specification of bilingual equivalences and of the process of conveying the meanings of expressions from a source language (SL) text into a target language (TL) text (Hutchins & Somers, 1992). Can machines replace human translators, or they just are useful as aids to their human masters? These questions and many others similar to them are asked more often than not.

In her paper on exploring user acceptance of machine translation output, Bowker and Ehgoetz (2007) cite evidence of a growing demand for translators coupled with a death of qualified translation professionals. This is one of the main reasons for the renewed interest in machine translation (MT) (pp. 209-224). Other reasons such as the need to penetrate new markets, being required to publish translated material at the same time as source language material, an on-going need to reduce the cost of translation, and last but not the least, need to correspond with one another across the lingual and the cultural barriers, have made the need for quality machine translated texts, if not vital, an important one.

A. *Advantages and Disadvantages of MT*

The suitability of machine translation for any particular task depends on the nature of the source text and the intended purpose (skopos) of the translation. For instance, poetry and industrial parts lists represent two extremes in this spectrum, for while it would be meaningless to use machine translation for the former, one could reasonably expect a perfect result (requiring no post or pre-editing) for the latter; given, of course, that all the related nomenclature was in the system's dictionaries. It is clear then that machine translation cannot be used indiscriminately. Many source texts have to be excluded from MT on the grounds that their text typology precludes anything but the attention of a skilled and highly specialized human translator. However, movie transcripts provide type of texts which fall somewhere in the middle of this spectrum. Indeed, for this category, translation alone will not normally suffice; a complete adaptation is needed to take account of the native aspirations, susceptibilities and prejudices of the target market.

Based on a panel at conference held in 13th of December, 2007, machine translation's problems and issues were categorized as follows:

1. Inherent linguistic problems due to bilingual lexical differences;
2. Non-linguistic problems of reality;
3. Problems which come about due to stylistic differences;
4. Hybrid systems.

The first category is what this study is what this study aims to concentrate on. Bilingual lexical differences can be divided into two groups: bilingual lexical ambiguity and lexical gaps. Bilingual lexical ambiguity poses a far greater challenge in translating a text from one natural language into another. In other words, one lexicon in the source language can have more than one semantic equivalent lexicon but only one contextually correct semantic equivalent in target language. One of the best possible examples of this type of problem is the presence of more than one semantically equivalent lexicon for the English word 'cousin' in Persian language.

Presence of such ambiguities gives rise to significant shortcomings like inadequacy in using machine translation for subtitling. If subtitling of movies using machine translation is not semantically and lexically adequate, then, how inadequacies in using accurate or contextually correct equivalents can be justified by the movie industry. It is here that implementation of a theory in translation, namely 'skopos theory', proves to be practically functional.

B. *Practical Functionality of the 'Skopos Theory'*

Hatim (2001) states:

Skopos (Greek: 'purpose', 'goal'), is an appropriate name for a theory which focuses on such aspects of the translation process as interactional dynamics and pragmatic purpose. The theory holds that the way the target text eventually shapes up is determined to a great extent by the function, or 'skopos', intended for it in the target context. Such a strategy can and often does run counter to orthodox equivalence-based procedures since here the end essentially justifies the means. (P.74)

'Skopos theory' is a new trend towards the target-focused and culturally-oriented theories of translation studies which can be very helpful in the modern world of translation studies since the target text readers are the main concerns of translators and also translation commissioners recently. If all the criteria defined by the skopos of the translation project are fully met, then the translation project is accepted, by the commissioner of that project, as an adequate one. Reiss and Vermeer (1984), cited in Munday, (2001) state:

Adequacy describes the relations between source text and target text as a consequence of observing a skopos during the translation process. In other words, if the target text fulfills the skopos outlined by the commission, it is functionally and communicatively adequate. (P.80)

According to this definition of adequacy, it is not important which translation method and strategy is used by the translator. The only thing which is significant is the accordance of the target text with the commission expectations.

Based on the 'skopos theory', it is the commissioner who defines the adequacy level expected from the translation project, and since the commissioners in the movie subtitling industry such as media companies operate under the influence of capitalism rules, namely time, cost and feasibility, machine translation becomes a valuable tool at their disposal. To this end, translations which would otherwise be considered inadequate and inaccurate are found to be adequate and accurate enough by the translation commissioners.

C. Case Study

In this case study, it is tried to show the accuracy the above statements by taking a close look at the dilemma of lexical ambiguities and inaccurate use of lexical equivalents in the subtitles of nine movies in English language and their Persian subtitles. By doing so, we tend to prove that despite of the inaccuracy of these Persian subtitles from an expert human translator's point of view, the commissioners of these translation projects have found them adequately accurate for introducing to the target language audience.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Design

This study is an exploratory research project which analytically looks into the correct use of equivalents used in Persian subtitling of nine movies in English language using machine translation.

B. Corpus

Nine movies in English with Persian subtitles were chosen as the corpus of this study. Each of these movies' choice is based on a series of justifications which are as follows:

1. 'The Bucket List', with its genre being drama, is a true representative of pure machine translation without any human interference. This is a perfect example of word-for-word translation strategy.
2. 'Blonde Ambition', with the comedy-drama genre, is a representative of a combination of word-for-word and literal strategies of translation. The unit of translation for this movie is at times word and at other phrase, and the message of the source text is rendered roughly.
3. 'Private Valentine', is a comedy which is showing the characteristics of a literal strategy of translation. The message of the source text rendered by the subtitles of this movie is vague and the unit of translation used in the translation of the subtitles is phrase.
4. 'Obsessed', somewhat, represents another strategy in translation. Its genre is drama, and its translation is still source-text-oriented; in other words, it is what is called 'faithful translation'. The form of machine translation used in this movie focuses on words and phrases as the corpus for translation.
5. 'Step up 2, the Streets', represents the features of drama genre. The strategy of translation used in this movie is a combination of faithful and semantic translation. The limitation of the translation to the words and phrases' structures and the maintenance inside the borders of source language culture can be considered the main characteristics of the translation strategy utilized for this movie.
6. '88 Minutes', is of action genre, and its translation, mostly, follows the semantic translation strategy. In other words, the machine translation of the movie does correspond to the Source Language's (SL) culture. It is syntactically beautiful and the translation shifts are well considered.
7. 'The Reader', which its genre is drama, is translated based on the parameters of the communicative translation strategy. In other words, the thought and the message of the Source Text (ST) and the use of dynamic equivalents constitute the main objectives of the MT.
8. 'Knowing', is a movie with science fiction genre, and the translation strategy used by the MT is idiomatic translation. In other words, the culture of the SL had a pivotal role in the selection of the adequate equivalents with respect to the 'skopos theory'.
9. 'Last Dance', is a movie with drama genre, and the dominant translation strategy used in its subtitling is communicative translation. In other words, the unit of translation is proposition and direct rendering of source language items and syntactic structures are not the main concerns of this type of translation. The only significant issue is transferring the thoughts and messages of the source text to the audience.

IV. PROCEDURE

After viewing 30 movies, the following nine movies were selected based on six translation strategies which are often used by translators: The Bucket List, Blonde Ambition, Private Valentine, Obsessed, Step up 2, the Streets, 88 Minutes, The Reader, Knowing and The Last dance made up the corpus of the study. Each movie was viewed carefully, and the equivalents which were used inaccurately in Persian subtitles were selected. The source language lexicons, the time frames, the inaccurate Persian translation of the source text words and their accurate Persian equivalents were compiled in tables 1-9.

V. RESULTS

The source text lexicons and their machine translations equivalents in Persian were mined from the corpus and were tabulated in tables 1-9. In these tables, across from each Persian translation by the done by the machine, a more accurate Persian translation was entered in the tables. The contents of these tables are self-explanatory and show the significant difference which exists between the machine translation output and the more accurate equivalent for the source language lexicon provided by the researchers.

1. SELECTED SUBTITLES FROM THE MOVIE, KNOWING

Locations in the movie (H/MIN/SEC)	Source text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Correct Equivalent
0:37	Time capsule	محفظه آثار فرهنگی	کیسول زمان
10:29	Universe	جهان	دنیا
11:56	Randomness	اختیار	تصادف
29:24	Janitors	نظافتچی	نگهبان
34:41	Bye	بای	خداحافظ
52:59	East Coast city	خاور شرق	شهر ساحلی شرقی
59:12	Put back	برگرد	برو عقب
1:39:36	Safe	امنه	جاش امنه
1:50:33	Safe	امنه	جاش امنه

2. SELECTED SUBTITLES FROM THE MOVIE, THE READER

Locations in the movie (H/MIN/SEC)	Source text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Correct Equivalent
Chapter 1			
05:05	Find out	توانستن	پیدا کردن
05:57	Keep away	جای دیگه رفتن	دور شدن
08:11	Bed	جا	رختخواب
08:45	Hall	راهرو	سالن
29:12	Flesh	النت	بدن
30:51	Danger	خطر	ریسک
31:02	Live life	خارج شدن از زندگی	زندگی کردن
38:47	Little	ملوس	کوچولو
52:50	Rephrase	دوباره تکرار کردن	جور دیگری بیان کردن
Chapter 2			
31:57	Romance	عاشقانه	داستان عاشقانه
43:21	Will	خواهش	وصیت نامه
54:38	Ill	بد	مریض

3. SELECTED SUBTITLES FROM THE MOVIE, 88 MINUTES

Locations in the movie (H/MIN/SEC)	Source text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Correct Equivalent
07:01	Idiot	عوضی	احمق
09:23	Can I help you?	کاری داشتن؟	میتونم کمکتون کنم؟
17:25	Gay	گی	هم جنس گرا
17:52	Publicly	از طرف جامعه	در ملا عام
22:40	Doc	دکتر جون	دکی
26:38	Dean	خانم	رئیس - مدیر
43:17	Sufficient grounds	دلیل قانونی	مدارک کافی
46:43	Working class	طبقه متوسط	طبقه کارگر
46:44	Rock star	ستاره	ستاره گروه راک
49:24	Show up	آمدن	سر و کله کسی پیدا شدن
50:00	That's good	خدا رو شکر	خوبه
57:36	That's horrible	پاور نکردنیه	وحشتناکه
1:40:25	Intersect	به هم برخوردن	به هم رسیدن
1:41:51	Sister	عزیز	خواهر

4. SELECTED SUBTITLES FROM THE MOVIE, OBSESSED

Locations in the movie (H/MIN/SEC)	Source text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Correct Equivalent
3:18	Movement	رفتن	اسباب کشی
5:46	Appointment	کالک	وقت ملاقات
5:55	Allusion	کالک	اغفال
5:56	Temp	وسوسه	کار آموز - کارمند موقت
8:55	Punk	بی ارزش بودن	سر کار گذاشتن
20:08	Get around	گذشتن	دوره چرخیدن
29:39	Fool	اشتباه	احمق
44:26	Bye	بای	خداحافظ
50:24	Worried	متاهل	نگران
54:14	Oversleep	خوابیدن	خواب ماندن
1:04:25	Psychiatric evaluation	سنجش	آزمایش روانی
1:18:13	This means a lot to me	این منو برام خیلیه	این برام خیلی اهمیت داره
1:26:10	Security system	سیستم فعال	سیستم امنیتی
1:28:00	The police knocking at the door	باید با درها باشه	پلیس دم در است
1:30:05	Get fired	زدن	اخراج شدن

5. SELECTED SUBTITLES FROM THE MOVIE, THE BUCKET LIST

Locations in the movie (H/MIN/SEC)	Source text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Correct Equivalent
2:05	Invent	آوردن	اختراع کردن
2:12	Get you	آدرس دار شدن	گیرت اوردم
3:59	Hold on	دوست داشتن	صبر کردن
4:12	Well?	و؟	خب؟
4:18	Really good	خیلی زیبا	واقعا خوبه
4:37	Supervisors	انجمن	سرپرستان
4:52	Donations	موقوفیت	کمک های مالی
4:53	Atrophy	دور	کم
5:25	Health spa	مرکز سلامتی	چشمه آب معدنی درمانی
7:24	Intelligent	زنده	هوشیار
8:15	Tube	مار	لوله
9:20	Paralyzed	بی حس	فلج
9:42	Surgery	تحقیق	عمل جراحی
12:30	Visitors	معاینه ها	عیادت کنندگان
13:38	Operation	عملکرد	عمل جراحی
17:43	Interesting	زیبا	جالب
19:41	Try	خسته بودن	امتحان کردن
20:32	Take care	تنها با خودته	مواظب خودت باش
23:07	Key hole	سوراخ در	سوراخ کلید
23:48	So waste	چی به هدر رفت	خیلی بیهوده است
23:57	Devil	جهنم	شیطان
24:26	Denial	دنیل	انکار
27:03	You're blocking my view	تو فکری	جلوی دید منو گرفتی
27:15	Find	شناختن	پیدا کردن
28:22	Survey	جفت	تحقیق
29:20	Play cards	کارت داشتن	پاسور بازی کردن
31:26	Kick the bucket	پیپ قبا این که بریم بیرون	به درک واصل شدن
33:19	Month	زبان	ماه
37:05	Give up	امیدوار بودن	دست برداشتن
40:48	Pull	گرفتن	کشیدن
48:46	What do you believe in?	کجا می ری؟	به چی ایمان داری؟
48:51	Big bang	محکم به هم زدن	تصادم/ برخورد بزرگ
48:53	Random	اختیاری	تصادفی
51:20	Cross off	در زدن	خط زدن
52:58	Hot bath	شستشو	حمام داغ/ گرم
55:27	Buoyant	عالی	شناور
1:01:32	Good-looking	زرتنگ	خوش تیپ
1:04:02	Arranged marriage	ازدواج سفارشی	ازدواج از پیش تعیین شده
1:09:21	Silk suits	ایرشنم مناسب	لباسهای ابریشمی
1:15:50	I miss her	او اشتباه می کند	دلم برایش تنگ شده
1:25:51	One man deal	واسه مرد مشکل نیست	کار یک نفر
1:25:55	I'm afraid	می ترسم	متاسفم که
1:28:02	Owe	تشکر کردن	مدیون بودن
1:29:59	Complete strangers	قوی تر	کاملا غریبه
1:31:48	Open	بزرگ بودن	باز بودن

6. SELECTED SUBTITLES FROM THE MOVIE STEP UP II (THE STREETS)

Locations in the movie (H/MIN/SEC)	Source text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Correct Equivalent
04:24	Get off	بلند شو	ولش کن
04:44	Why are you pushing me so much, man	چرا این قدر من را فشار می دی	چرا این قدر من را هل می دی
07:06	They are in good shape	من می گم واقعا جالبه	من فقط دارم می گم آنها آدمهای خوبی دارن
09:04	Breaking and entering	در شکستید و وارد شدید	ورود غیر قانونی به
12:54	We were hoping to the fundraiser to the fall showcase	امیدوارم به جوری بتونیم اونا رو به سالن نمایش وصل کنیم	امیدوار بودیم بتونیم برنامه جمع آوری پول برای امور خیریه را با نمایش پاییز برگزار کنیم
13:27	You have no idea about the consequences of your action, do you?	به عاقبت کارات فکر کرده بودی	تو از پیامد های کارات خبر داری
13:30	Actually, there is a little more to it	فکر کنم باید بیشتر فکر می کردی	در واقع بیشتر از اونیه هست که می گئی
13:46	You just cost someone their future	یعنی قیمت زندگی آینده یک نفر	تو باعث نابودی آینده یک نفر شدی
14:29	Intern	همکار	کارآموز
15:14	Fine	خوب	خوش قیافه
16:00	Rehearsal	نمایش	نمایش تمرینی
16:29	Uniform	لباس	لباس فرم
17:06	Look like	اینطوری هستن	شبیه باشن
22:36	Whats up man	صبرو می خورم	چه خبرا
27:07	Regret	عصبانی	پشیمان
30:10	Rehabilitation	استراحت	بازآموزی
31:20	Froze out	آدم نشودی	ممنوع الورد
33:37	Obvious	مشهود	معلوم
34:12	Irritating	عصبانی	آزار دهنده
34:15	Defensive	آزار دهنده	دفاعی
40:55	Quit	رفتی	متوقف کردن
43:31	Screwed	پیچوند	درمانده
46:28	Old school	مدرسه قدیمی	متعلق به نسل قدیم
66:05	Kick me out	من را نزن	منو بیرون نکن
67:22	Kick, kick	بزن بزن	لگد لگد
81:09	Tight	تنگ	عالی و فشنگ

7. SELECTED SUBTITLES FROM THE MOVIE, PRIVATE VALENTINE

Locations in the movie (H/MIN/SEC)	Source text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Correct Equivalent
2:28	freak	نترس	کنترل از دست دادن
3:26	Stir	بد کردن	راهنمایی کردن
8:32	Kiss some ass	دهن سرویس کردن	چاپلوسی کردن
9:28	Cash out	جمع کردن	نقد کردن
19:29	Scorned	مريض	دل شکسته
27:14	Crashed	سوار ماشین	تصادف کردن
28:32	Insecure	مشکوک	اسیب پذیر
39:34	Yell	گریه	داد زدن
40:48	Gang	بازی	گروه
55:02	Body shot	بدن الکلی	بادی شات
78:52	Turn in	بیدار شدن	خوابیدن
91:27	Priority	شرایط	اولویت

8. SELECTED SUBTITLES FROM THE MOVIE, BLONDE AMBITION

Locations in the movie (H/MIN/SEC)	Source text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Correct Equivalent
3:07	engaged	مستقل	نامزد کرده
4:31	Carved	نگه داشتن	حک کردن
12:06	Crash	افتادن	خوابیدن
17:03	Pumpkin	کنو تنیل	عزیزم
17:09	Right	مستقیم	حق
18:09	Tie	بو	کروات
18:36	Fire	آتش	اخراج کردن
22:44	Smile	لب	تبسم
39:40	Horn	شاخه	خار / مشکل
41:57	Amber	کهربا	امیر (اسم خاص)
56:58	Lord	ارباب	خدا
62:30	Bored	تخت	هیئت مدیره
70:07	Dog	سگ	سو سیس

9. SELECTED SUBTITLES FROM THE MOVIE, LAST DANCE

Locations in the movie (H/MIN/SEC)	Source text (ST)	Target Text (TT)	Correct Equivalent
4:14	Resume'	شروع کردن	سابقه کار
5:37	Solid	سخت	خوب
27:51	Dead set	مرگ تو	مصمم
42:35	Fused	ذوب شدن	به هم جسیبیدن
42:58	Wild	وحشی	شلوغ
45:44	Beat cop	پلیس بی رمق	پلیس
61:00	Recess	عقب نشینی	تعطیلات
63:32	Fancy	تخیلی	تجملی
64:28	Let it go	اجازه رفتن بده	فراموش کن
78:09	Capital punishment	مجازات اصلی	اعدام

VI. CONCLUSION

Based on the arguments made by the researchers from the introduction section on, using machine translation for subtitling movies from English into Persian, despite lacking accuracy, is found to be adequate by those who have acted as the commissioners of these translation projects. It is obvious from the results of this exploratory case study, compiled in tables 1-9, that accuracy was not and could not have been one of the criteria which were selected as the skopos of these translation commissions. The capitalistic point of view which places the emphasis on cost and bottom line, has dictated the choice of criteria by the translation commission. In other words, since machine translation provides the translation commission with a more feasible, less costly and less time consuming alternative to using expert human translator who would have been able to produce far better output, it was chosen as the translation alternative by the commissioner. As the old saying in the capitalistic circles goes, "time is money, so if you save time, you have saved money and padded your bottom line." As we all know, the bottom line is all that matters in business in a capitalistic world.

Considering what the results in tables 1-9, so boldly, put into display, to improve upon the quality of such machine translation outputs, two important steps could be taken. First, better data banks of lexicons, phrases, propositions and idioms could be developed, so that the machine can have access to a more comprehensive resource. Secondly, a better programming could be done to better apply various translation strategies to the process of machine translation.

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