

# A Comparative Study of the Persian Subtitles of American Historical Drama and Romantic Comedy Movies with the Originals

Shabnam Shakernia

Fars Science and Research University, Shiraz, Iran

Email: shabnam\_shakernia@yahoo.com

**Abstract**—This study aimed to investigate the use of Vinay and Darbelnet's direct and oblique translations strategies in the Persian subtitles of American historical drama and romantic comedy movies. The present study aimed also to investigate which of the two main categories of translation strategies (direct and oblique translation) in the main focus of subtitlers in historical drama and romantic comedy movies. In order to systematically conduct the study, six American historical drama and romantic comedy movies with their corresponding Persian subtitles were analyzed. The findings obtained from the analysis show that direct translation strategy is used more in historical drama movies and manifest that historical drama subtitlers tend to have translations which are literal, directional and faithful to the source language and culture. The findings also indicate that oblique translation strategy is applied more in the Persian subtitles of romantic comedy movies. It is obvious that the Persian subtitles of romantic comedy movies attempt to accommodate themselves more to the target language.

**Index Terms**—direct translation strategy, oblique translation strategy, Persian subtitles, historical drama, Romantic comedy

## I. INTRODUCTION

Audiovisual Translation (AVT) is the most important discipline in recent translation studies at the age of globalization and advanced technologies in media distribution. Delabastita (1989, p.196, cited in Branauskiene, 2008, p.14) used the term "Audiovisual Translation (AVT) for the audiovisual language transfer. Luyken (1991, p.11, cited in Branauskiene 2008, p.14) defines audiovisual language transfer as "the process by which a film or television programme is made comprehensible to a target audience that is unfamiliar with the original's source language. Audiovisual translation is divided into inter-lingual and intra-lingual translations. Subtitling is one kind of inter-lingual AVT.

Gottlieb (2004, p.135) provides the following definition for subtitling: "The rendering in a different language of verbal messages in filmic media in the shape of one or more line of written text presented on the screen".

Translation typically has been used to transfer written or spoken SL texts to equivalent written or spoken TL texts. However, the difference between SL and TL and the variation in their cultures make the process of translating a real challenge. To overcome various obstacles such as lack of equivalence and cultural untranslatability, translators use various translation methods and translation procedures. Newmark (1988) states: "while translation methods relate to whole texts, translation procedures are used for sentences and smaller units of language."

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The present study works on the seven translation procedures proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (2000). Vinay and Darbelnet introduced their model in 1985. This model carries out a comparative stylistic analysis of the texts in two languages. It notes differences between the languages and identifies different translation strategies and procedures. This theory identified the two general translation strategies: direct translation strategy (borrowing, calque and literal translation) and oblique translation strategy (transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation).

## III. STATEMENT OF THE PURPOSE

The present study intends to investigate to what extent the procedures proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet in Venuti (2000) were followed in the Persian subtitles of the American historical drama and romantic comedy movies.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

Translators can choose from two methods of translating, namely direct and oblique translations that they are to some extent correspondent to literal and free translations. In some translation tasks it may be possible to transpose the source

language message element by element into the target language, because it is based on either (i) parallel categories, in which case we can speak of structural parallelism, or (ii) on parallel concepts, which of the result of metalinguistic parallelisms. But translators may also notice gaps, or "lacunae", in the target language (TL) which must be filled by corresponding elements, so that the overall impression is the same for the two messages.

It may, however, also happen that, because of structural or metalinguistic differences, certain stylistic effects cannot be transposed into the TL without upsetting the syntactic order, or even the lexis. In this case it is understood that more complex methods have to be used which at first may look unusual but which nevertheless can permit translators a strict control over the reliability for their works: these procedures are called oblique translation methods.

In this research, six American movies; (Troy (2004), Alexander (2004) The King of Heaven (2005)) in historical drama and (How to Lose Friends & Alienate People (2008), The Proposal (2009), Valentine's Day (2010)) in romantic comedy genres will be the case study. Seven translation procedures under the categories of direct and oblique translation strategies proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (2000) are going to be examined.

#### A. Data Collection Procedures

The procedures for collecting the required data consisted of two parts; viewing the films and focusing on the Persian subtitles of each film. In order to have a clear understanding of the dialogue of the film, the researcher used the English subtitles of each film while watching the film. The sample size was 150 sentences in each genre in this study. The Persian subtitles of films were used to compare the SL dialogue of the films with their given translations using the seven procedures proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (2000). For each procedure, the researcher used three columns to have the original words or expressions with their translated ones and the applied translation procedures. In order to analyze the subtitling translations, the unit of translation as the basis for analysis should be clarified. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995, p.21, cited in Munday, 2001) define the unit of translation as 'the smallest segment of the utterance whose signs are linked in such a way that they should not be translated individually.'

After gathering the data, the researcher calculated the frequency of these procedures employed by Persian translators in the subtitled films. Finally, the researcher compared the data which were collected from the three American historical drama films with the data which were taken from the three American romantic comedy films.

#### B. Data Analysis

This study aims to figure out to what extent the Persian subtitles of the selected American historical drama and romantic comedy movie followed the seven procedures proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet. To explore this point systematically, a number of tests of Chi-square were run to determine whether the observed frequencies of the use of these seven procedures were statistically significant or not.

##### Translation procedures investigated in the Persian subtitling

In this study, seven translation procedures proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (cited in Venuti, 2000) were used. These seven procedures are borrowing, calque and literal translation which are under the category of direct translation and transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation under the category of oblique translation. In each procedure, some examples are extracted from those six films mentioned above and the corresponding translations are presented along with them.

##### Procedure 1: Borrowing

Borrowing refers to a case where a word or an expression is taken from the SL and used in the TL, but in a 'naturalized' form. This type of change is made to conform to the rules of grammar or pronunciation of the TL.

Examples:

You can't have the whole world, Agamemnon.

تو نمی تونی همه دنیا رو بدست بیاری "آگاممنون".

Thebes, Athens, Sparta had fallen from pride.

تیس، آنتز، اسپارطا از حکومت سقوط کردند.

Today is Valentine's Day.

امروز روز ولنتاینه.

##### Procedure 2: Calque

Calque is the second subcategory of direct translation which refers to the case where the translator imitates in his translation the structure or manner of expression of the ST.

Example:

It's your buddy, Romeo Midnight. I know.

من دوست شما رومئو از برنامه نیمه شب هستم. میدونم.

##### Procedure 3: literal translation

Literal translation is the last subcategory of direct translation which is a direct transfer of a SL text into a grammatically and idiomatically appropriate to TL text.

Examples:

Remove your army from my land.

ارتشت رو از سرزمین من، بیرون ببر.

Let's settle this war in the old manner. Your best fighter against my best.

بیا این جنگو طبق عادت قدیمی برگزار کنیم. بهترین جنگجوی تو مقابل بهترین من.

Men, all men, reach and fall... .

مردها، تمام مردها صعود می کنند و فرو می ریزند.

#### **Procedure 4: Transposition**

Transposition involves replacing one word class with another without changing the meaning of the message. The method also involves the grammatical change that occurs in translation from SL to TL.

Examples:

I sent a boy to look for him.

یه پسر رو فرستادم دنبالش.

It takes strong men to rule.

فرمانروایی یه مرد قوی رو میطلبه.

She was a suicider, cut off her head.

اون خودکشی کرده، سرش رو قطع کن

#### **Procedure 5: Modulation**

Modulation is another type of oblique translation method which changes the semantic and point of view of the SL.

Examples:

I like your land.

من اینجا رو دوست دارم.

... open to all.

... و برای همه آشکار شد.

I know all of it.

ذره ذره اش را می شناسم.

#### **Procedure 6: Equivalence**

This term is used to refer to cases where languages describe the same situation by different stylistic or structural means. It is especially used for idioms and proverbs.

Examples:

She's your meal ticket.

اون برگ برنده.

And ... we're clear.

و ... تمام.

#### **Procedure 7: Adaptation**

Adaptation is the last type of oblique translation which is used in cases where the type of situation being referred to by SL message is unknown in the TL culture.

Examples:

I've made it ... to Shangri La.

بالاخره به این بهشت برین رسیدم.

That's my Armani tuxedo.

این هم کت و شلوار آرمانیه منه.

No, I'm fine.

نه من نمی خوام. خیلی خیلی ممنون.

## **V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The findings of this study show that the subtitlers of both two genres used the three translation procedures; borrowing, transposition and modulation almost equally in the Persian subtitles of American historical drama and romantic comedy movies. However, literal translation was used more in historical drama rather than romantic comedy movies. The results indicate that subtitlers attempted to stick to the source language and tried to be more faithful to the source text in historical drama movies. Also, the findings manifest that the occurrence of equivalence and adaptation in romantic comedy movies is higher than the use of these translation procedures in historical drama movies. This shows that the Persian subtitlers in romantic comedy movies are inclined more toward the target language (Persian) and have tried to make natural and acceptable translations rather than adequate and faithful ones.

The results of the study show that direct translation (borrowing, calque and literal translation) is used more in historical drama movies than in the Persian subtitles of romantic comedy movies. However, oblique translation (transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation) is applied more by the subtitlers of romantic comedy movies. The findings manifest that historical drama subtitles are more faithful to the source language structure and culture. In other words, they are source-oriented. However, the Persian subtitlers of romantic comedy movies attempt to accommodate themselves more to the target language and use more natural equivalence in their translations to make them more comprehensible and satisfactory for the target audience.

TABLE 5.1.  
FREQUENCY OF THE SEVEN TRANSLATION PROCEDURES IN THE PERSIAN SUBTITLES OF HISTORICAL DRAMA AND ROMANTIC COMEDY MOVIES

Movie genres		Translation Procedures							Total number of sentences
		B.	C.	Lt.	T.	M.	E.	A.	
Historical Drama movies	Frequency	38	-	667	17	29	4	6	150
Romantic Comedy movies	Frequency	44	1	487	23	39	36	24	150
	X <sup>2</sup>	0.439	-	26.06	0.9	1.46	25.06	10.08	
	p	3.84	-	3.84	3.84	3.84	3.84	3.84	

P<0.05

TABLE 5.2.  
FREQUENCY OF DIRECT AND OBLIQUE TRANSLATION STRATEGIES IN THE PERSIAN SUBTITLES OF HISTORICAL DRAMA AND ROMANTIC COMEDY MOVIES

Movies genres		Direct Translation	Oblique Translation	Total Number of Sentences
Historical Drama movies	Frequency	706	56	150
Romantic Comedy movies	Frequency	532	122	150
	X <sup>2</sup>	24.44	24.46	
	p	3.84	3.84	

P<0.05

## VI. CONCLUSION

The main features in historical drama and romantic comedy movies are semantic, directional, faithful, source text-oriented and foreignized. Also, this study implies that applying more oblique translation (transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation) by the Persian subtitlers to produce communicative, natural, target text-oriented and domesticating features in their Persian subtitles makes comprehensible, satisfactory and enjoyable translations for the target audience.

The findings of this research can provide guidelines for the novice translators who need to gain the initial knowledge to take the preliminary steps in having comprehensible, natural and communicative translation. Moreover, this research can work as a useful tool in the translation courses such as film translation for the university students majoring in translation. It can also give an idea about subtitling translations to the university professors offering audio/visual courses to students of translation.

At the end, given the important fact that a few studies have been conducted on the Persian subtitles of American movies in Iran and considering the increasing importance of the field of subtitling in today's world of technology, a need is felt for allocating further researches to the domain of subtitling especially in Iran and it is hoped that this study paves the way for other studies in this area.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Baranauskiene, R. and Blazevidiene, R. (2008). Audiovisual Translation of Feature Films from English into Lithuanian. *Jaunuju Moksliniku Darbai*, 4(20), 11-14.
- [2] Darbelnet, J. (1983). Comparative Stylistic as a linguistic discipline. *Multilingua - Journal of cross cultural and Interlanguage Communication*, 2(3), 127-132.
- [3] Gottlieb, H. (2004). Subtitling-a New University discipline. In: c. Dollerup, etal. (Ed.). *Teaching Translation and Interpreting*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- [4] Munday, J. (2001). *Introducing translation studies. Theories and Applications*. New York: Routledge.
- [5] Newmark, P. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. New York: Prentice Hall International.
- [6] Venuti, L. (2000). *The Translation Studies Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.

**Shabnam Shakernia** was born in Shiraz, Iran in 1978. Diploma in Science from Azzahra Pre - University in 1996. B.A. in English Language Translation from Islamic Azad University, Shiraz branch in 2001. M.A. in Translation Studies from Fars Science and Research, Shiraz, Iran in 2011.

She has been TEACHING English in Payam Inst., Noorekherad Inst., Medical Science Elementary School, Farhang Inst., and Maad Inst. between 2001 to 2009. She has taught all the levels of Tiny Talks, Parades, Spectrum and Interchange books. Also, she was responsible for handling the English training classes for the teachers. She was in charge of inspecting and observing their classes during the term. Besides, she has taught general and Specific English courses of different fields in Payame Nur University. She can speak, read and write French.