

## **An Ideological and Cultural Study of Taboo Terms Translation in English-Persian Dubbed Movies by IRIB**

Ehsan Yaghoot Miandoab\*, English Department, Varamin-Pishva Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran  
*Ehsan\_Yaghoot@yahoo.com*

### **Abstract**

In our modern life, the introduction of new technologies and subsequent boom in satellites, television, as well as the Internet has made the world a much smaller place allowing different nations, cultures, and languages to interact more frequently. One of the biggest concerns of audiovisual translators is cultural and ideological items which taboo terms are included. This study aims at investigating the strategies applied in the translation of taboo terms, from English into Persian, in five dubbed Hollywood movies broadcast by Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting. The original movies were compared with their dubbed Persian versions based on Sharifi and Darchinian's (2009) strategies. The "Censorship" strategy is the topmost used strategy in the rendition of the taboos with the highest frequency (56%). The second frequent strategy is "Taboo to Taboo" which involves 19%, the third frequent strategy is "Euphemism" with 13%, and the least frequent strategy for dealing with taboos is "Taboo to Non-Taboo" which is 12%. The results of the present study show that considering ideological and cultural aspects of the society, Iranian AV translators attempted to moderate and soften the original taboo terms, which would be considered as taboo by the cultural standards of the Iranian audiences.

**Keywords:** Culture, dubbing, ideology, norms, Sharifi and Darchinian's Model, taboo

### **Introduction**

Yule (2010) believes that "language as a means of communication is entangled with culture, which is socially acquired knowledge as a main component of every language" (p. 267). Yule (2009) holds that "culture is a phenomenon like L1 that is acquired with no acute conscious awareness" (p.216). Culture is a series of values and conventions, which are shared among a certain speech community and is in the service of directing people's thoughts and manners (House, 2009). Thus, language and culture are strongly associated with each other so far as one can claim that language can be considered as an expression of culture and culture is expressed by language.

Almost, in all languages, taboo expressions are thought of as indivisible components of each language. Robinson (1996) points that "taboos pass from one generation to another at deep unconscious levels of our behavior, through the contagion of somatic responses and they never die" (p.24). According to Ljung (2011), taboo terms can be placed into five major classes or themes, specifically religious theme, scatological theme, reproductive organ theme, sexual activities theme, and finally the mother theme (pp. 184-185).

In addition, translating cultural items, which taboo expressions are enclosed, are considered as one of the most problematic issues in audiovisual translation (AVT) for almost all translators. The problem even deteriorates in interlingual translation due to different cultures of the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). Though, regarding the culturally-specific items, it is somehow not possible. Indeed, the meaning of these kinds of elements is strongly linked to the precise cultural context they originate. Besides, movie makers have to reflect the authentic and real language of the speech community in their movies in order to make movies

more tangible for their audiences. Taboo words are an ever-present part in nowadays' Hollywood movies. Hence, translators not only deal with words, but also are engaged with the TL culture.

Finally, this study aims to shed light on the strategies applied in translation of taboo terms in five dubbed Hollywood movies, namely *Brake* (2012), *The Expendables* (2010), *Golden Eye* (1995), *Haywire* (2000), and *Contraband* (2012) broadcast by IRIB. In order to consistently detect the words which are locally understood as taboo language according to the Iranian culture in the American movies, the categorization of taboo expressions in Iran introduced by Sharifi and Darchinian (2009) was employed.

This study aims at answering the following research questions based on Sharifi and Darchinian's model (2009):

Q1. What are the strategies applied for the rendition of taboo terms and expressions in English-Persian Dubbed Movies?

Q2. What are the most frequent strategies used in the translation of taboo terms and expressions in English- Persian Dubbed Movies?

## Review of Literature

### Sharifi and Darchinian's Model

The classification of the concept of taboo terms appears clear and practical for the Western world, however, Sharifi and Darchinian (2009) in a local study found that the Persian translators have to deal with a wider and fairly different range of categories as taboo language:

- a) Private relations between men and women whether legitimate or illegitimate and words related to them such as, kissing, hugging, sleeping with, cheating on, etc.
- b) Boys' and girls' relations before marriage like boyfriend, girlfriend, etc.
- c) Calling or naming outer sexual organs and related words;
- d) Words and expressions related to alcoholic drinks and drugs;
- e) Swearing, curse and impolite expressions;
- f) Stating features of immoral behaviors and habits like thieving, etc.
- g) Issues related to religion and belief which are against those of the translator's society;
- h) Stating some political issues which are rather threatening to the translator's society and cause some political situations to remain highly unstable.

The analysis of the strategies used for the rendition of the taboo language resulted in the following categorization:

- a) Translating the source culture taboo to a target culture taboo (Taboo to Taboo)
- b) Deletion of the source culture taboo (Censorship)
- c) Substituting the target culture taboo with a target culture non-taboo (Taboo to Non-taboo)
- d) Rendering the source culture taboo to a target culture euphemistic equivalent (Euphemism)

### Audiovisual translation (AVT) and dubbing

The concept of Audiovisual Translation refers to screen translation or film translation. The term screen translation emphasizes the locative of the medium or carrier where the translation product appears, namely the TV, cinema or video screen theatre not opera (Karamitrolou, 2000). He prefers the concept of audiovisual translation because it emphasizes all translation activities which cover all audio-visual dimensions of the communicative mode, and according to Gambier (1994), there are multiple messages of audiovisual programs in the modern world, such as documentary films, short-length films, cinema films, TV broadcasts, children's programs, radio interviews, business videos, and home videos (p.275). Other scholars like

Bartrina (2004) believes that “in using the term audiovisual texts we receive via two channels, the visual and acoustic such texts contain images that move rapidly one after another” (p.157).

Nowadays people are surrounded with many audiovisual materials at home, workplaces, schools, libraries, restaurants, etc. such as different kinds of screens, like TV, cinema, DVD players, cell phones, computers, etc. which are based on the omnipresence of the image (Diaz-Cintas, 2008). Dubbing includes activities such as the addition of music and sound effects to the original dialogues, the omission or the replacement of unwanted or poorly recorded audio, or the re-recording of the entire dialogue, narration or music (Szarkowska, 2005). According to Hendriks (1984), media plays a vital role in the age of globalization and film industries, so dubbing has become important issue. In fact, in order to make a film accessible to those who do not understand the language that is spoken in it, two methods are currently used: Subtitling and dubbing (p.9).

The task of dubbing is very convoluted, and many factors are involved in the process comprising many stages. The first step starts by the client like a TV station sending the transcript of the movie to the dubbing studio. The client might commission the dubbing studio to dub the original songs or assign special rules to the dubbing actors. Then, an independent translator is asked to translate the received material by means of the original movie and the transcript. Next, a proof-reader confirms the translation. At the synchronization phase, the synchronizer matches the translation with the original, and omits and adds information if necessary to preserve synchronization. At last, in the dubbing sessions the synchronized and translated scripts are given to the dubbing actors to play their roles at a minimum of time and cost. Screen materials always encounter great changes and adaptations that make this field quite sensitive.

In addition, Iran is one of the countries has a considerable number of foreign movies has been dubbed, and all TV channels provide dubbed versions of fictional screen products including all kinds of movies such as animated movies, voiceover versions for documentaries, and interviews, whereas subtitling is seen in few cases on low profile interviews on news programs. It is natural that the Iranian viewers have grown accustomed to dubbing. Moreover, in the country which is known to defy Westernization culturally, expressing a strong preference for dubbing is reasonable since there is a relation between dubbing and nationalism. Therefore, Danan (1991) states that “dubbing is an assertion of the supremacy of the national language and its unchallenged political, economic and cultural power within the nation’s boundaries” (p. 612).

Chaume (2013) takes his definition of dubbing further as follows:

Dubbing consist of translating and lip syncing the script of an audiovisual text, which is then performed by actors directed and, where available, with advice from a linguistic consultant or dubbing assistant. In some European and Asian countries (i.e. France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and Turkey, or China and Japan, among others) it is the most widespread form of audiovisual translation for productions from foreign distributors and television companies. This complex process is linguistic and cultural, but also technical and artistic, where teamwork is vital in order to achieve a high quality end product. (p.107)

### **Norms in translation**

Toury (1995) introduced three sorts of norms in translation:

Initial norms deal with acceptable and adequate kind of translation, whereas preliminary norms refer to “translation policy and directness of translation, and operational norms relate to the choices in the text itself; metrical norms (is the text complete) and textual linguistic norms (the lexical and syntactic choices). (p.113)

Munday (2012) believes that norms are components “peculiar to cultures, societies, and time being sociocultural limitations which are acquired by persons during the educational and socializing processes” (p.112). In their socio-cultural dimensions, in the process of translation, norms put some limitations on translators’ behaviors because the acceptability of target text (TT) is of great concern to them. Due to socio-cultural norms like religion, morality, among others, translators manipulate the source text (ST) by means of some strategies such as omission to create an acceptable translation for the TT audience (Pei, 2010). Pym (2010) points out that while dealing with descriptive translation theories, “norms usually operate at a wider more social level” (p. 73).

Norms are not supposed to be followed by all translators as they are not general rules in order to be respected (Pym, 2010). According to Delabastita (2008), norms can be parts of the main factors which have guided or influenced the translators in their choices (p. 234). In their socio-cultural dimensions, in the process of translation, norms put some limitations on translators’ behaviors because the acceptability of target text (TT) is of great concern to them. Due to socio-cultural norms like religion, morality, among others, translators manipulate the source text (ST) by means of some strategies such as omission to create an acceptable translation for the TT audience (Pei, 2010), and the realization of the concept of *norm* leads translators to a better understanding of translation strategies (Toury, 2004). Toury (1995) maintains that “norms are translation of what is wrong or right” (p.55).

### **Ideology**

Translation and ideology are related to each other in several ways. It can be said that all translations are ideological because the choice of source text to be translated and target text is determined by aims and objectives of social agents (Schaffner, 2003). Tahir-Gureaglar (2003) believes that “translation is a kind of activity that displays negotiation among different agents, such as translators, authors, critiques, publishers, editors, and readers” (p.113). Therefore, translation displays in an implicit ideological context. In recent cases, the ideological implications are rather manifesting. Larger entries make use of translation to achieve certain ideological goals.

The ideology of a translation will be a combination of the content of the ST and the various speech acts represented in the source text relevant to the source context, layered together with the representation of the content, its relevance to the receptor audience, and the various speech acts of the translation itself, addressing the target context as well as resonance and discrepancies between these two utterances (Tymoczko, 2003). Nord (2003) maintains that “ideology is a set of main ideas supported by a group, a school, a society or even an individual author” (p.90).

Alvarez and Vidal (1999) believe that:

Behind every one of the translator’s selections, as what to add, what to leave out, which words to choose and how to place them, there is a voluntary act that reveals his history and the socio-political milieu that surrounds him, in other words, his own culture. (p.5)

### **Taboo**

According to Freud (1967), cited in Robinson, (1996) taboo is a primitive prohibition which is imposed from outside or by authorities and it is directed against the most powerful longings to which human beings are subject (p. 28). According to Robinson (1996), taboos are conveyed from one generation to another and they never die. This procedure happens at deep unconscious levels of our behavior, through the contagion of somatic response (p. 24). Taboo

blocks the behaviors which are forbidden (Robinson, 1996). Freud (1950) discerns that “taboo can denote everything, whether a person or thing, and it also denote the prohibitions arising from the same attribute” (p.18). Wardhaugh (1990) discerns that “taboo is one way in which a society expresses its disapproval of certain kinds of behavior believed to be harmful to its members either for supernatural reasons or because such behavior is held to violate a moral code” (p.230). Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2013) believe that “taboo has a strong cultural component representing particular customs and the way people view their society” (p.112). Allan and Burridge (2006) expressed that “taboos arise out of social constraints on the individual’s behavior where it can cause discomfort harm or injury” (p.1).

Among the similar studies have been done in the field of AVT in Iran and abroad, Sedighi and Najian Tabrizi (2012) aimed at investigating the frequent methods in dubbing taboo words and sentences in some dubbed romantic movies from English into Persian after the Islamic Revolution of Iran via Toury’s (1995) suggested framework for norm classification. Their study conjointly investigated the norms that contributed dubbers and movie subtitlers to dub the taboo words from English into Persian after the Islamic Revolution of Iran. The results of their study show that “euphemism” with 73% was the topmost frequent used strategy in dubbing the taboo words and expressions in the romantic movies.

Furthermore, Vossoughi and Etemad Hosseini (2013) expressed within the method of translation, culture is among the foremost factors which cause a myriad of problems, particularly when the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) belong to completely different cultures. The matter even deteriorates confronting those concepts existing in each ST and TT, but with completely different expressive meaning. Their study aimed to investigate the norms of translating taboo words and concepts after the Islamic Revolution of Iran through Toury’s (1995) framework for classification of norms in translation studies. The corpus of their study were the Coelho’s novels between 1990 and 2005 and their Persian translations. In sum, they found out that, in Iran, the dominant ideology was a crucial aspect in the process of decision making by translators. The movie *Scent of a Woman* is one of the most demanding tasks in the field of AVT deals with the translation of cultural items that investigates the translation of cultural items from the perspectives of ideology. The final translation must possess the original features of the SL culture and translators must respect all the cultural differences therein (Aremellino, 2008).

Translating language and cultural taboos in audiovisual products have always been the matter of discussion. Some spectators are shocked by seeing or hearing taboo words, while some others criticize the translator for moderating these terms and praise those translators who attempt to maintain the indecency of original terms loyally. The task of translators for translating these terms is assuming a moderate and balanced stance. It means that translators should at first interpret the style and message of original text and then by considering the attitude of the audience chooses an appropriate translation.

## Methodology

### Corpus

Regarding the research type, this study is a descriptive, corpus-based and comparative research, since some new information have been derived from the data, collected from the original scripts of the popular American movies along with their Persian dubbed versions. To determine the subjects to form the corpus needed for the present study, a criterion sampling technique based on Saldanha and O’Brien (2013) was used, and this technique of sampling has successful application in corpus based studies. A set of predetermined criteria was set to select

the movies which would best serve the purpose of the research. The details of the original movies and their dubbed versions selected for the present study are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1. The English Corpus of the Study**

No.	Original Title	Release Year	Run Time	Director
1	The Expendables	2010	۱۰۳	Sylvester Stallone
2	Golden Eye	1995	۱۳۰	Martin Campbell
3	Haywire	2000	۱۱۷	Steven Soderbergh
4	Contraband	۲۰۱۲	۱۱۰	Balthasar Kormakur
5	Brake	۲۰۱۲	۹۰	Gabe Torres

Table 2 shows that, the length of the Persian corpora is shorter than English corpora due to the censorship occurred in the dubbed versions by IRIB. Several scenes were fully omitted, because they had inappropriate materials such as sexual intercourse, drinking, kissing, and so on.

**Table 2. The Persian Corpus of the Study**

No.	Title Translation	Back Dubbing Year	Run Time	AV Translator
1	The Expendables	2011	89	Aria Kafsh Zarin
2	Golden Eye	1998	103	Amir Houshang Zand
3	Haywire	2002	93	Mahdi Arjomand
4	Contraband	2012	87	Aria Kafsh Zarin
5	Brake	2013	72	Changiz Jalilvand

The selected movies for the present research consist of the following criteria:

- \*Including a high frequency of taboo language (words),
- \*Dubbed by a single AV translator,
- \*Dubbed by an Iranian AV translator with Persian as his native language.

### Procedure

In addition to the original movies, the dubbed version of the movies was also acquired from Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting. The following steps were taken to collect and analyze the obtained data. Initially, after watching the original movies, the taboo words and expressions were extracted by the researchers and recorded. Each English taboo word or expression was compared with its dubbed equivalent in Persian. After reviewing all the recorded pairs of taboos, the strategies employed for rendition of the taboo expressions were identified and categorized into four basic types. Subsequently, descriptive statistics, including frequency,

percentage, and sum, were provided for each strategy. In order to consistently detect the words or expressions, the categorization of taboo concept in Iran introduced by Sharifi and Darchinian (2009) was employed: (a) Censorship, (b) Taboo to Taboo, (c) taboo to non-taboo, and (d) Euphemism.

One of the objectives of the present study was to find out, what is the frequency of different strategies used in translation of taboo terms in the movies, thus, the Chi-square test was conducted.

### Results

A total of 393 examples of taboo terms were found in the English corpus of the present study. Table 3 shows, the strategies, frequency, percentage, and sum of taboo language in each of the five movies.

**Table 3.** *Used strategies and their statistical indices*

Strategies	1	2	3	4	5	Total	%
<b>Censorship</b>	15	68	38	64	35	220	56
<b>Taboo to Taboo</b>	5	23	6	34	6	74	19
<b>Euphemism</b>	4	21	7	11	8	51	13
<b>Taboo to non-Taboo</b>	3	17	4	10	14	48	12
<b>Total</b>	27	129	55	119	63	393	100

\*Movies: 1) Brake. 2) Golden Eye. 3) Contraband. 4) Haywire. 5) Expendables.

Initially, taboo terms marked and investigated in the present study are those which are locally understood as taboo words according to the contemporary Iranian culture found in the selected American movies. In other words, some of the marked language strings as taboo might not be considered taboo language in the Anglophone world like alcoholic drinks, boyfriends and girlfriends and their relationships, which could be explained due to the existing religious differences, and a review of the corpus of the study showed that a variety of taboo language occurred in the original movies.

In order to answer the first research question and provide a better understating of the strategies applied for the analysis of taboo terms and expressions have been extracted from the movies based on Sharifi and Darchinian's model proposed on (2009), some taboo examples from the original movies and their dubbed versions by IRIB were shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** *Taboo examples and the back-translation of the Persian dubbed equivalence from the selected movies*

Strategy	Taboo Language	Back Translation of the Persian Dubbed
<b>Taboo to Taboo</b>	<b>Motherfucker!</b>	Bastard.
	You are an <b>asshole</b> .	You are an awful dirt bag.
	What the <b>hell</b> is wrong with you?	What the hell is wrong with you?
	What the <b>fuck</b> are doing?	What the hell are you doing?
<b>Euphemism</b>	Are you <b>fucking</b> kidding me?	Are you joking?
	Make me bust your <b>ass</b> .	I'll kick you.
	I've never been to a <b>brothel</b> , either.	I've never went to a night club.

	Get the <b>hell</b> out of here.	Go out.
<b>Censorship</b>	<b>Fuck off!</b>	-
	You lucky <b>bastard</b> .	-
	<b>Sleep with me?</b>	-
	Your <b>drinks</b> Sir.	-
<b>Taboo to Non-Taboo</b>	He argued with his <b>girlfriend</b> .	He argued with his fiancé.
	Showering after <b>sex</b> .	Showering after a hard job.
	She is to be a <b>prostitute</b> .	This woman is our servant.
	She <b>kissed</b> me.	I talked with her.

In order to answer the second research question, the Chi-square results show that  $\chi^2 (12, N = 5) = 23.08$ ,  $p = 0$ , considering  $*p < 0.05$  which means that the strategies applied had not the same distribution among the movies. In other words, the Chi-square results in Table 4 indicate, the distribution of the strategies applied was not the same and their frequency differed from one another statistically.

**Table 4. The Chi-square results**

Chi-square	Value	Df	Asymp. (2-sided)
<b>Pearson Chi-square</b>	23.083*	12	.027
<b>Likelihood Ratio</b>	22.524	12	.032
<b>Liner-by-Liner Association</b>	.072	1	.789
<b>N of Valid Cases</b>	393	-	-

\*Pearson Chi-square is significant at 0.05 levels (2-tailed).

### Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the Iranian AV translators try to produce an acceptable, target-oriented translation. AV translators meet the expectations of the target society in terms of American dubbed movies, or the American AVT expectancy norms (Chesterman, 1997). According to Danan (1991), the foreign utterances are forced to conform to the domestic norms and frame of reference (p. 612). The Anglophone world is in principle a secular culture, whereas the Iranian culture is religion-oriented and relatively restrained. Since the Persian culture does not accept interferences easily from the outside, and cultures take up defensive stances (Hermans, 2013), AV translators seem to attempt to tone down the original taboo terms which would be recognized as taboo by the cultural standards of the receiving Iranian audience if translated without any modifications because they can be challenging intrusions to the integrity of the Iranian public audience. In other words, the ideology of the professional Iranian AV translators directs their overall translation decisions and strategies to produce a rendition of the movie script which would best fit the target culture.

In a more general picture, the mentioned strategies can be categorized into a binary classification of a) keeping the taboo force or b) suppressing the taboo force in the dubbed version. In that case, three of the four strategies fall into the latter division including Deletion, Taboo to Taboo and Taboo to Non-taboo. In the light of this binary classification of the strategies, the overall results, would tend to tone down the force and effect of the original taboo



language segments recognized as tabooed by the criteria of the Iranian audience since only nearly one-fifth of the taboo language was kept in the dubbed versions, and approximately four-fifth of the taboo words and expressions were censored or suppressed into a taboo to non-taboo or even some type of euphemism. To determine the dominant norm among the used strategies in transferring taboo words and expressions from English into Persian in AVT, it is referred to Catford (1965) who believes that the frequency of a shift in translation which is more than 30% can be considered a norm. Therefore, it can be concluded that in this research, censorship with the frequency of higher than 30% is considered a norm in translating taboo words and concepts. It can also be concluded that in dubbing from English into Persian, the translators try to produce 'acceptable' translation, i.e. based on Toury's initial norm and translators' decision in subjecting themselves to the norms of source language or target language in order to produce adequate or acceptable translation.

According to Toury (1995), translation policy refers to the factors which determine the selection of text for translation in specific culture, language or time, and he doesn't pursue this area in case studies. Directness of translation' relates to an intermediate language in which a translation occurs. For this study, there is no intermediate language and the translation occurs directly from English into Persian. The findings of the present study can lend support to Mattson (2006), Ghassempur (2009), Khoshsaligheh and Mardani (2014), Ghazizadeh and Mardani (2011), Midjord (2013), Alavi et al. (2013), Tveit (2009), that deleting or censoring of the taboo language was the key strategy.

In the end, there is no need to say that the ideology of a society plays a crucial role in determining the norms of a society, especially in the societies like Iran after the Islamic Revolution. In such societies, religious norms and ideologies are stronger and more impressive than those of other societies.

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