A Study on Explicitation Strategies Employed in Persian Subtitling of English Crime Movies

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Abstract—The present study seeks to investigate the application of expansion strategy in Persian subtitles of English crime movies. More precisely, this study aims at classifying the different types of expansion used in subtitles as well as investigating the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the application of each type. To achieve this end, three movies; namely, The Net (1995), Contact (1997) and Mission Impossible 2 (2000), available with Persian subtitles, were selected for the study. To collect the data, the above mentioned movies were watched and those parts of the Persian subtitles in which expansion had been used were identified and extracted along with their English dialogs. Then, the extracted Persian subtitles were classified based on the reason that led to expansion in each case. Next, the appropriateness or inappropriateness of using expansion in the extracted Persian subtitles was descriptively investigated. Finally, an equivalent not containing any expansion was proposed for those cases in which the meaning could be fully transferred without this strategy. The findings of the study indicated that the reasons range from explicitation (explicitation of visual, co-textual and contextual information), mistranslation and paraphrasing to the preferences of subtitlers. Furthermore, it was found that the employment of expansion strategy was inappropriate in all cases except for those caused by explicitation of contextual information since correct and shorter equivalents which were equally capable of conveying the intended meaning could be posited for the original dialogs.

Keywords—Audiovisual translation, English crime movies, expansion strategies, Persian subtitles.

I. INTRODUCTION

AUDIOVISUAL translation (AVT) refers to the process by which a movie or television program is made comprehensible to a target audience that is unfamiliar with the original's source language. The increasing demand for foreign movies and television programs in the beginning of the third millennium has led to the growing importance of AVT in this era. Among the different forms of AVT, subtitling is gaining more and more popularity even in countries where dubbing has been common as it is a relatively inexpensive and quick way of audiovisual language transfer. Subtitling can be defined as "the production of snippets of written text to be superimposed on visual footage –normally near the bottom of the frame- while an audiovisual text is projected, played or broadcast" [1].

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AVT is a form of constrained translation. Subtitling, however, is more constrained than the other forms of AVT. In dubbing, (and, to some extent, also in voice-over) restrictions on the form of the target text stem mostly from the fact that equivalents have to match the visual component, that is the image, so what the audience hear is more or less consistent with what they see [2]. Subtitling, by contrast, involves transferring a spoken text in the SL into a written text in the target language. This transfer causes certain constraints. Reference [3] speaks of formal and textual constraints on subtitling. Formal constraints are imposed on the subtitles by the visual context of the film. The visual context dictates that the verbal component should be limited to what is not shown on screen in order to minimize redundancy. Subtitles must also comply with a set of textual constraints including space constraints (a maximum of two lines with not more than 35 characters in each line) and time constraints. The duration of a subtitle depends on the quality and complexity of the text, the speed of the dialog, the average viewer's reading speed (150 to 180 words per minute), and the necessary intervals between subtitles [3].

Furthermore, movie viewers go to theaters or sit in front of TVs to watch and enjoy movies, not to read subtitles. In other words, they may be able to read one or two lines of subtitles very fast, but miss the movie itself. These factors narrow down the range of possible equivalents and translation strategies available to the subtitler. In other words, the above mentioned factors dictate that subtitles should be as concise as possible, and must be part of the movie and their integration with the original must be such that they become invisible. Thus, subtitlers must be very careful about the application of strategies which lead to the lengthening of the TT. One such strategy is expansion which occurs when the volume of translation is increased by adding new units of meaning to the content of the original [4]. Taking these factors into account, subtitlers should try to use expansion only when they have to do so since inappropriate use of this strategy only results in relatively long subtitles which make it difficult for viewers to keep pace with them.

Expansion, which is sometimes referred to as addition, is one of the translation strategies which cause the translation to be longer than the original. Reference [5] was one of the first translation scholars to deal with the concept of expansion in translation. As a matter of fact, he uses the term addition which is quite similar and sometimes handled as synonym to expansion. In his famous book "Toward a Science of Translating: With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating", he deals with the

main techniques of adjustment used in the process of translation, particularly additions, subtractions and alterations. According to [5], additions are of the following types: "(a) filling out elliptical expressions, (b) obligatory specification, (c) additions required because of grammatical restructuring, (d) amplification from implicit to explicit status, (e) answers to rhetorical questions, (f) classifiers, (g) connectives, (h) categories of the receptor language which do not exist in the source language, and (i) doublets" (p. 227). Reference [6] has a negative attitude toward expansion, and describes it in the following terms:

From the viewpoint of the text, expansion can be qualified as "empty." It can coexist quite well with diverse quantitative forms of impoverishment … the addition adds nothing, that it augments only the gross mass of text, without augmenting its way of speaking or signifying. The addition is no more than babble designed to muffle the work's own voice. Explicitations may render the text more "clear," but they actually obscure its own mode of clarity. The expansion is, moreover, a stretching, a slackening, which impairs the rhythmic flow of the work. … expansion aggravates the initial shapelessness of the work, causing it to change from a shapeless plenitude to a shapeless void or hollow. ... Expansion flattens, horizontalizing what is essentially deep and vertical … (p. 290)

Furthermore, [7] lists several strategies used in translation under the title of production translation strategies. According to Chesterman, production strategies have three different categories, namely syntactic strategies, semantic strategies and pragmatic strategies. Chesterman lists expanding, which is another term for expansion, among the semantic production strategies which are applied in the process of translation. Expansion is also one of the strategies used in subtitling. Reference [3], for example, has devised ten strategies that he sees at work in the process of subtitling, and which he classifies as expansion, paraphrase, transfer, imitation, transcription, dislocation, condensation, decimation, deletion, and resignation. According to [3], expansion is used when the original requires an explanation because of some cultural nuances not retrievable in the target language.

Addition is regarded as one of the strategies for translating extralinguistic culture-bound references (ECRs) in subtitling [8]. It is stated that by using this strategy, the translator intervenes to give guidance to the target culture audience. An example is given by Pedersen in which the mere proper name "Ian Botham" has been rendered as "Cricketspelaren Ian Botham" (which literally means the cricket player Ian Botham) in Swedish since "Botham" would be virtually unknown to most Swedes, so by adding "cricketspelaren" (the cricket player), the Swedish subtitler has rendered this ECR in a way that has made it more accessible to the Swedish audience. Nevertheless, Pedersen adds that this strategy is very space consuming.

Explicitation, which is very similar to expansion, is claimed to exist in subtitling [9]. Based on why and when explicitation occurs, which stands at the basis of her methodology, [9] identifies three main types of explicitation in subtitling which

are cultural, channel-based and reduction-based explicitations. According to [9], cultural explicitation is triggered by a cultural gap between source culture and target culture, and it is extra-linguistic in nature. The term channel-based explicitation is used for those instances of explicitation determined by the impact of shifts from one semiotic channel to another, especially those cases elicited by a shift from the visual non-verbal channel or from the auditive non-verbal channel to the visual verbal channel, namely the written language in the form of subtitles. Finally, reduction-based explicitation is prompted by the need to reduce the ST in order to make it fit into each subtitle-block, thus making it readable in a short span of time.

A number of studies (see [10] for a critical review) conducted on expansion so far have investigated the application of this strategy in subtitling (such as [3], [4]). However, as far as the present researchers know, none of these studies has focused on the different types of expansions in subtitles and the appropriate employment of this strategy in subtitling. As such, the present study may be considered as one of the first attempts to explore this aspect of expansion in subtitling.

The present study aimed at investigating the employment of expansion strategy in Persian subtitles of English movies in order to investigate the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the employment of the different types of this strategy in context of subtitling. More specifically, the main objective of the present study was to determine what types of the expansion strategy were used in Persian subtitles of English crime movies, and to find out whether the employment of such types of expansion appropriate and necessary.

II. METHOD

A. Raters

To contribute to the issue of reliability, the researchers did their best to establish the stability (intra-rater reliability) as well as the reproducibility (inter-rater reliability) of the coding scheme. In so doing, the content of the subtitles was once analyzed and categorized by three coders independently using the same content analysis grid. The coders were the researchers themselves. It is worth mentioning that the coders operating independently were not working together to come to a consensus about what coding they would give. Moreover, after a two-week interval, the same coders re-coded the same data in the same way once more.

B. Materials

The data used in this study were gathered by analyzing the Persian subtitles of the following American movies which are available in the video stores in Iran. Contact is a 1997 science fiction drama film adapted from the Carl Sagan novel of the same name and directed by Robert Zemeckis. The Net is a 1995 thriller directed by Irwin Winkler. It features Sandra Bullock, Jeremy Northam and Dennis Miller. Mission Impossible 2 is a 2000 action movie directed by John Woo. The rationale behind choosing these three movies among many other options available to the researchers was twofold.

First, the researchers could find more instances of expansions in the above mentioned movies in comparison with other movies. Secondly, the selected movies contained very few translation mistakes. In other words, the subtitles in these movies were of a better quality compared to other movies analyzed by the researchers.

To have a better understanding of the dialogs of the movies, and avoid any possible problems in the correct hearing of the dialogs due to regional accents, idiolects, fast mode of speaking or the use of informal language, the researchers used the English transcripts of the movies while watching them. These transcripts are available on different sites on the Internet. Moreover, the Persian subtitles of the movies were used to compare the SL dialog of the movies with their given translations.

C. Theoretical Framework

In order to detect the cases of expansion in Persian subtitles of the English movies under investigation, the researchers used a model of subtitling strategies proposed by [4]. The model includes six strategies used by subtitlers in the process of subtitling; namely, Expansion, Reduction (Omission), Generalization, Specification, Neutralization, and Compression. Reference [4] provides a definition for each of these strategies; however, only expansion is dealt with here since the other strategies are not the focus of this study. According to [4], equivalent translation occurs when the translator attempts to reproduce the sense of the original in full. Such a definition calls into question the previous definitions of expansion proposed by other scholars such as [3]. Reference [4] explains that the above subtitle is not an example of expansion since it is essential for the Norwegian translation to be explicit in order to reproduce what is self-evident to a French reader (the fact that the Palais Bourbon is home to the national assembly). According to [4], in such cases, the translator is forced to carry some obligatory transformations in order to achieve equivalence, thus, they cannot be considered as expansion.

In his model, expansion represents an alternative solution to a possible (more) equivalent translation. In other words, it is an optional transformation resulting in a solution that the subtitler would probably not have chosen if equivalence was the guiding principle. Reference [4] asserts that expansion occurs when "the subtitler neither reduces nor translates the units of content, but increases the volume by adding new units" (p. 205), and that we can consider a strategy to be expansion only when a shorter translation, still fully equivalent in context, would have been possible.

D. Data Collection Procedure

To collect the date, first, the selected movies were watched and the Persian subtitles in which expansion had been employed were identified and extracted along with their corresponding English dialogs. Next, the extracted Persian subtitles were categorized based on the reason that caused expansion in each case. Then, the appropriateness or inappropriateness of using each type of expansion in subtitles

was investigated considering the limitations and properties of subtitling. After that, a shorter equivalent not containing expansion was proposed for most of the original English dialogs to show that the meaning can be fully conveyed in most cases without resorting to expansion. Finally, the subtitles and the proposed translations were compared in terms of lexical density by calculating the number of characters. Since this study was based on the theoretical model of the present study and this model was a non-quantitative and descriptive-explanatory one, a non-statistical and descriptive method was used in order to analyze the data.

III. Data Analysis and Discussion

In this section, first, the results of the process of identifying the types of the expansion strategy are presented. It is followed by an explanation of the decisions made on whether these strategies are appropriately employed by the subtitler or not.

A. The Types of Expansions Identified

The analyses of the data revealed that six types of expansions identified in Persian subtitles of English movies can be classified based on the reason that gives rise to expansion. These types of expansions are presented in Table I in order of their frequency.

TABLE I
EXPANSION TYPES

Type of Expansion	Frequency	Percentage
Expansions caused by explicitation of co-textual information	15	29.45%
Expansions caused by Paraphrasing	13	25.4%
Expansions caused by subtitlers' preferences	10	19.6%
Expansions caused by explicitation of visual Information	7	13.75%
Expansions caused by Mistranslation	3	5.9%
Expansions caused by explicitation of contextual information	3	5.9%

1. Expansions Caused by Explicitation

Reference [11] defines explicitation as "additions in a translated text which cannot be explained by structural, stylistic, or rhetorical differences between the two languages" (p. 108). The analysis carried out by the researchers in this study indicated that explicitation is the main reason bringing about expansion. In fact, it was revealed that the following three kinds of explicitation can cause the subtitles to become expanded.

1.1. Expansions Caused by Explicitation of Visual Information

Reference [3] distinguishes between four semiotic channels in polysemiotic texts such as films or TV programs: the non-verbal visual channel (i.e. the picture), the non-verbal audio channels (e.g. music and sound effects), the verbal audio channel (i.e. the dialog) and the verbal visual channels (signs and captions), all of which carry semiotic information. In this study, explicitation of visual information refers to making explicit in the subtitles information that is present only in the

non-verbal visual channel (i.e. the picture) of the movie. Expansions caused by explicitation of visual information accounted for 13.75% of all cases of expansions identified in this study.

1.2. Expansions Caused by Explicitation of Co-textual Information

According to [12], co-text refers to the linguistic environment in which a word is used within a text. Co-text is very specifically text surrounding the particular word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, etc., under discussion. Following this definition, explicitation of co-textual information in this study refers to making explicit in subtitles information that is implicit in the co-text or the immediate linguistic environment of the original dialog. Expansions caused by explicitation of co-textual information accounted for 29.45% of all cases of expansions identified in this study.

1.3. Expansions Caused by Explicitation of Contextual Information

Context or context of situation refers to the physical, temporal, spatial or social environment in which verbal exchanges take place [12]. Thus, context has a more general definition compared to co-text. In this study, explicitation of contextual information refers to making explicit in the subtitles information that is implicit in the context of the movie. Expansions caused by explicitation of contextual information accounted for 5.9 % of all cases of expansion identified in this study.

2. Expansions Caused by Mistranslation

According to [13], mistranslation refers to any distortion of meaning as a result of misunderstanding the text, or a conscious decision to skip translating at all. Expansions caused by mistranslation formed 5.9 % of all cases of expansions identified in this study.

3. Expansions Caused by Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing refers to loose rewording or translating in your own words [14]. It is a strategy in which the meaning of the original dialog is paraphrased into a TL equivalent which is not an exact rendering of the original. In this study, expansions caused by paraphrasing formed 25.4 % of the cases of expansions identified.

4. Expansions Caused by Subtitlers' Preferences

Expansions caused by Subtitlers' Preferences refer to those expansions which have not been caused by explicitation, mistranslation or paraphrasing, but rather have been caused by personal preferences and decisions of subtitlers. This kind of expansion accounts for 19.6 % of all cases of expansion identified in this study.

B. Appropriateness or Inappropriateness of Using Each Type of Expansion in Subtitles

Subtitling is a highly constrained form of translation which involves formal and textual constraints. These constraints along with the audience's main purpose for watching subtitled movies, i.e. enjoyment, dictate that subtitles should be as concise as possible. Thus, it seems that the employment of expansion, which leads to the lengthening of subtitles, should be limited only to those cases in which it contributes to a better understanding of the film by the audience.

In the following section, after offering necessary argument for appropriateness or inappropriateness of employing each type of expansion in subtitles, a shorter translation not containing expansion will be proposed for those cases in which the application of expansion is inappropriate. It should be noted that the proposed translations are formulated based on the argument presented, and in view of [4] claim that a strategy can be considered to be expansion only when a shorter translation, still fully equivalent in context, would have been possible. In those cases in which the translation offered by subtitlers is inaccurate in terms of the level of formality or repetition of pronouns, even a third shorter translation is proposed. In some cases, the shorter translations offered are only a few characters shorter than the subtitles; however, it should be noted that we are dealing with subtitling in which lengthening a word or sentence by two or three characters can break the rhythm of a scene and sabotage its meaning [15].

Finally, the subtitles and the proposed translations will be compared in terms of lexical density (length of the sentence). This comparison will be done by calculating the number of characters in each translation using Microsoft Office Word 2007.

1. Expansions Caused by Explicitation of Visual Information

As it was stated earlier, explicitation of visual information is the process of making explicit in subtitles information which is present in the non-verbal visual channel of the movie, i.e. the picture. However, there is no need to make explicit what the viewers can see on the screen. In other words, subtitlers should allow viewers to receive part of the information from the visual channel of the movie available on the screen, and limit subtitles to what is not shown on the screen in order to minimize redundancy and length. As a result, shorter translations can be proposed for all the cases in which explicitation of visual information resulted in the expansion of subtitles.

2. Expansions Caused by Explicitation of Co-textual Information

Explicitation of co-textual information, or more precisely, making explicit in the subtitles information that is implicit in the co-text has caused the highest number of expansions in this study. Nevertheless, subtitlers should bear in mind that the viewers are also aware of the co-text, and possess the ability to infer some information from it because they read and follow the subtitles. As a result, it can be claimed that it is not necessary to expand subtitles by adding such information that can be inferred from the co-text. In view of this argument, a new translation not containing expansion can be proposed for all the subtitles expanded as a result of explicitation of co-textual information.

3. Expansions Caused by Explicitation of Contextual Information

Explicitation of contextual information, which is the addition of the information implied within the context of the movie to the subtitles, seems to be an efficient type of expansion as the information implied by the context is not as immediately accessible to viewers as the information presented by the co-text or the visual channel of the film, i.e. the screen. That is to say, the viewers may not be able to readily infer such information; therefore, it seems that this kind of expansion helps them get a better understanding of the dialogs uttered.

4. Expansions Caused by Mistranslation

Mistranslation or incorrect translation does not always lead to an increase of the volume of the text, which is a necessary characteristic of expansion according to [4]; however, in some cases, it can bring about expansion by adding to the volume of the subtitle. In these cases, subtitles would become shorter if correct equivalents are formulated for the dialogs.

5. Expansions Caused by Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is a translation strategy which may be quite useful in various forms of translation such as poetry translation; however, in a constrained form of translation like subtitling in which space and time constraints are highly critical, it may not be a suitable procedure provided that it leads to the expansion of subtitles. In other words, if paraphrasing results in long subtitles, it will be more appropriate to resort to a direct translation. On account of this argument, shorter subtitles can be proposed for those cases of expansions which are the result of paraphrasing if they are directly translated, and not paraphrased.

6. Expansions Caused by Subtitlers' Preferences

As stated earlier, expansions caused by subtitlers' preferences are those expansions which have been prompted by personal preferences and decisions of subtitlers. Although the addition of a few words to the subtitles as a result of subtitlers' decisions and preferences might not seem very important, but these additions, which lead to the expansion of subtitles, seem to be redundant – especially in the context of subtitling where conciseness is an important criterion [3] – owing to the fact that the meaning of the original dialogs can be adequately conveyed without them.

IV. CONCLUSION

Analysis and discussion of the data collected in this study entail the following conclusions. First, a number of reasons gave rise to the expansion of subtitles in the movies under investigation. These reasons range from explicitation (explicitation of visual, co-textual and contextual information), mistranslation and paraphrasing to subtitlers' preferences. Second, the application of expansion was not justified and appropriate in most cases since correct and shorter equivalents which were equally capable of conveying the intended meaning could be posited for the original dialogs.

In fact, most of expansions detected in this study were due to subtitlers' lack of adequate attention to two things. First is the nature of subtitling as a form of condensed translation in which brevity is of significant importance. Second is the fact that subtitling is an additive or complementary kind of translation. In other words, subtitles are just one channel of information in a polysemiotic text like a movie which includes other semiotic channels such as picture, music and sound effects, all of which carry information. Thus, subtitlers should not include everything in the subtitles, and should let viewers receive part of the information from other channels. It is hoped that the results of this study would be useful for subtitlers in rendering film dialogs as it helps them to acquire a better understanding of the application of expansion and the reasons that give rise to this phenomenon in subtitling. This would, in effect, culminate in the appropriate employment of this strategy in the context of subtitling which requires brevity and text reduction rather than expansion and addition.

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