# Codification of Nonverbal Elements in Subtitled Texts: A Case Study of the Persian Subtitles of English Movies

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## Abstract

Codification of nonverbal elements in subtitling movies is a challenge for translators. The aim of this study was to investigate the strategies used by Iranian subtitlers for codification of nonverbal elements in subtitling English movies into Persian using Perego's shifts and strategies (2003). For this purpose, a selection of 20 English movies (ST) with their Persian subtitles (TT) by Iranian subtitlers were selected and analyzed. At first, nonverbal elements in the ST were identified. Then, they were compared with their Persian subtitles using Perego's model to find out the strategies used by Persian subtitlers in codifying the nonverbal elements. The results showed 56 cases of codification of nonverbal information in the Persian subtitles. According to the results, the strategies suggested by Perego for the codification of nonverbal information in subtitling are applicable to subtitling from English into Persian. Among these strategies, addition (48%) had the highest frequency and reformulation (13%) had the lowest frequency in the subtitling of the 20 English films.

**Keywords:** Audiovisual translation, Nonverbal elements, Subtitling

## INTRODUCTION

Translation is a broad idea that can be perceived in many different ways. Venuti (1995) described translation as a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in target language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation. Yowell (2000) also identified translation as a process and product. As a process, translation is the interpretation of ver-

bal signs or utterances by other verbal signs orutterances in the same language; otherwise, it is called rewording. It is also used as a process of rendering messages from one language into another; this is called a translation proper. As a product, it is used to refer to the translated text which is termed the end product or the target text. Similarly, Hatim and Munday (2004) defined translation as a process and product. As a process, translation is an act of taking a text from one language and transforming it into another. In this sense, Hatim and Munday (2004)

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focus on the part of the translator. And as a product, translation focuses on the results achieved by the translator, the concrete product of translation. Translation can also take place between different media, for example, from spoken to written form. Translation has always been a central part of communication, consequently, translation studies as a field of research has developed over the last two decades since screen translation has slowly emerged as a new area (O'Connell, 2007).

Screen translation is a general term which covers various language transferring techniques used to make audiovisual material such as television programs, films, videos, and DVDs. Likewise, audiovisual translation (AVT) is a new field in translation studies. According to Diaz-Cintas (2010), audiovisual translation refers to the translation of products in which the verbal dimension is supplemented by elements in other media. For Chaume (2004), audiovisual translation is a mode of translation characterized by the transfer of audiovisual texts either interlingually or intralingually. As their name suggests, according to Chaume, audiovisual texts provide (translatable) information through two channels of communication that simultaneously convey codified meanings using different sign systems: the acoustic channel, through which acoustic vibrations are transmitted and received as words, paralinguistic information, the soundtrack and special effects, and the visual channel, through which light waves are transmitted and received as images, colors, movement, as well as posters or captions with linguistic signs, etc.

There are two larger subgroups for AVT: Revoicing and subtitling. Revoicing is the term which is used to denote audiovisual methods of translation with the aim of complete or partial cover of the text of the original product by the new text of the target language (Matkivska, 2014). Thus, revoicing can be subdivided into the following types: voice-over or half-dubbing, narration, audio description, free commentary, and dubbing. The written type of AVT is subtitling. Karamitraoglou (2000) defines subtitling as

translation of the spoken (written) source text of an audiovisual product into a written target text which is added on to the images of the original product at the bottom of the screen. Subtitling is characterized by a change of medium; the oral text is conveyed into written form in another language, which appears on screen simultaneously with the spoken text (Pettit, 2009). Cintas (2003) pointed out that the concept that has undergone greatest growth in translation is subtitling. It has many advantages; it is the quickest method and the most economical to implement. Compared to the other forms of AVT, subtitling is the most liable to evaluation and criticism, since both source and target texts are in front of the audience to judge, which makes the subtitlers' task ever more demanding (Veiga, 2009).

A film represents a multichannel and multi-code system of communication, a polysemiotic text (Gottlieb, 2005). Delabastita (1989) highlights the specific characteristics of AVT, and stresses that film is a multi-channel and multi-code type of communication. He focuses on the two channels in film communication: the visual and the acoustic. According to Delabastita (1989), a film is a complex meaningful sign consisting of a multitude of codes. He further describes the codes as being the verbal (including various dialects and sociolects), literary and theatrical (storyline and dialog), proxemic and kinetic (i.e., referring to non-verbal performance), and cinematic (techniques and genres). Thus, some parts of the message are conveyed through nonverbal elements in a film. So such elements should be taken into account in subtitling. Perego (2003) states that a viewer must be able to follow subtitles with ease and subtitles should be correct, clear, and credible and give the impression of being part of the action on the screen and it is desired that all the information be transmitted through subtitles so that the viewer should enjoy following a subtitled program or film in such a way that the subtitles form a natural part of the action. Sometimes the nonverbal information accompanying the situational con-

text is more meaningful than the purely verbal information. In order to reach the goals, explicitation of these implied information can help keep the cohesion and coherence of information and the message of the film and to ensure consistent high quality (Perego, 2003).

However, there are very few academic insights about the current status of subtitling in Iran. As Hajmohammadi (2004) emphasized, dubbing is currently the dominant mode of AVT in Iran and subtitles are reserved for documentaries and news. He indicated that there is a growing interest among young people and others for subtitled films on DVD or videotapes as a means to develop better English language skills. Audiovisual translation and subtitling in particular is a branch of translation studies which has recently been neglected by translatology scholars (Taylor, 2003). In subtitling, there is especially the lack of space and time. The translation is influenced by confined space available for the subtitle text, the time available for and between subtitle exposures, the timing of subtitle insertion, and removal, display, and format of the subtitles (Gottlieb, 2004). Besides, translation studies has primarily dealt with the process of transferring verbal signs and utterances. Nonverbal information has usually been neglected or taken for granted, as if the translation of verbal utterances is taking into account or simply including every single paralinguistic, kinesic or semiotic sign which cohesively complements verbal signs (Perego, 2003).

Audiovisual texts constitute one of the genres in which nonverbal information plays a relevant role. Movements, sounds, gestures, objects, colors, etc., are as important as verbal utterances, and their meaning cannot be ignored. Furthermore, it is precisely the interplay between verbal and nonverbal information, i.e. the interaction between the verbal and visual subtexts that mark audiovisual texts as an independent genre, as different sorts of texts, since the notion of text can be applied to both verbal and nonverbal signs sequences (or a combination of both) (Varela, 1997). Transferring nonverbal information in English movies subtitled into Persian is a demanding task. A translator should at first identify this information, and then make attempts to render and transfer them. There is no definite strategy for transferring nonverbal information in English movies subtitled into Persian. This study tried to investigate the strategies used for rendering and transferring this information by Iranian translators and subtitlers. This study could help subtitlers to try the strategies to transfer the nonverbal and intersemiotic information and in fact, the intended message in the best way which affect the audience reception.

The aims of this study were to determine the frequency of shifts and strategies used for restoration and recodification of nonverbal elements in subtitling by the Iranian subtitlers of a selection of 20 English movies subtitled into Persian, using Prego's strategies and shifts (2003) and also to examine the applicability of the strategies suggested by Perego for the codification of nonverbal information in subtitling from English into Persian.

The results of this study help professional translators and translation students know more about the occurrence of such challenges in subtitling so that they can make decisions more consciously. Identifying the most appropriate subtitling strategies for transferring nonverbal information could provide insights into the practice of subtitling from English into Persian. This study can be useful for both academic and practical purposes. The results of this study can also be used as a guideline to improve the future of subtitling from English into Persian.

**RELATED STUDIES**

While descriptive translation studies and skopos theory focused on the text in the target culture, Holz-Mänttäri (1984) dramatistic theory took translation beyond language from text to action. According this approach, the definition of text is also widened considerably: the "communicative occurrence" is by no means only verbal (Snell-Hornby, 2006). The perspective of nonverbal communication was introduced into translation

studies by Poyatos (1997), a Canadian of Spanish descent lecturing in nonverbal communication studies in the Departments of Anthropology, Psychology, and Sociology at the University of New Brunswick.

Payotos (1997) approached translation studies based on his methodologies and models from his own interdisciplinary research. The model focuses on paralanguage (qualities of voice such as timbre, resonance, loudness, tempo, pitch, intonation range, syllabic duration, and rhythm) and kinesics (body movements, posture, gestures, and facial expression). He applied nonverbal communication in the act of interpreting including conference interpreting, especially court or dialogue interpreting, and also in relation to literary translation. Nonverbal problems of literary and audiovisual translation and interpreting are discussed by Poyatos. The problems vary from the reader's perception of a character and misunderstanding which may happen when reading the description of facial expression and body gestures, the expression of paralanguage and kinesic behavior in the text. Such challenges are mostly manifested when rendering text between societies and cultures which seem "exotic" and distant.

According to Poyatos (1997), descriptions of nonverbal communication serve the stylistic function of creating a realistic fictional world, the semiotic-communicative function of recreating real-life nonverbal behaviors through the written words, and the technical function of characterization.

Dastjerdi and Rahekhoda (2010) investigated the application of expansion in the Persian subtitles of English films. They classified expansions used in subtitles into different types and investigated the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the employment of each type considering the time and space constraints of subtitling. Finally, they indicated that a number of reasons gave rise to the expansion of subtitles. These reasons ranged from explicitation (explicitation of visual, co-textual, and contextual information), mistranslation and paraphrasing to subtitler's pref-

erences. They concluded that the application of expansion 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 dialogues.

Marashi and Poursoltani (2009) attempted to identify the common subtitling strategies from Farsi into English employed in Iranian feature films and determine which strategy is the most frequent and which is the least. The corpus included 12 Iranian feature films along with their translations in English in the form of subtitles. They carried out a comparative analysis of 1469 frames of the films. The theoretical framework of the study was based on Gottlieb's (1992) classifications of interlingual subtitling strategies. The results of the study showed that all Gottlieb's criteria (1992) were applicable to Farsi into English subtitling of Iranian feature films and the most frequent strategy was transfer and the least frequent one was deletion. They concluded that the low frequency of deletion does not mean that the amount of reduction is also low. It was just to say that the total elimination of some of the dialogues in the frames is the least frequent strategy and quantitative reduction does not involve significant semantic reduction.

Ying-Ting Chuang (2006) investigated subtitle translation from a multi-modal approach and considered subtitle translation as intersemiotic translation. He suggested that subtitle translation involves more than the spoken mode and it also involves other semiotic modes, such as sound effects, moving images, music, and written modes. He took an approach in which the multiplicity of modes in film is represented in the subtitled translation. In his study, he focused on two interrelated areas: (1) how the concept of mode works in the translating process; that is, how the translator makes use of the specialized studying subtitle translation from a multi-modal approach meaning of each mode, (2) how the translator represents the meaning of the source text through the target modes; that is, how the

translator organizes the specialized meanings to produce the target text designed for the target context.

Chaung (2006) investigated the concept of multimodality in the process of subtitled translation. He argued that different semiotic modes contribute to meanings in the film text. He concluded that subtitle translation does not deal with one-to-one relationship but many-to-many in terms of the concept of semiotic mode. Furthermore, because of the multi-modal relationships, the translator has to consider the distribution and integration of the meanings of multi-modes in order to create a kind of equivalent wholeness between the source and target texts (Chuang, 2006).

Chaume (2004) focused on the interplay of non-linguistic codes in film language and audiovisual translation. He argued that for the analysis of audiovisual texts from a translational perspective, at least the theoretical contributions of translation studies and those of film studies are necessary. Then, he reviewed the different models of analysis of audiovisual texts offered from the perspective of translation studies. Finally, he introduced a new paradigm based on film studies, and provided the signifying codes that affect translation operations in the transfer. He analyzed the audiovisual text based on joining together translation theory, discourse analysis, and especially, film and communication studies, and concluded that the linguistic code, despite its predominant role, is partly effective in the construction, and then, transfer of meaning in audiovisual texts.

He believed that a translator should have to consider all the signifying codes present in the audiovisual material and a translation that does not take all the codes into account can be seen only as a partial translation. He stated that the relationship between image and word, the interplay of the signification systems of audiovisual texts, shows itself in terms of cohesion and coherence between the two simultaneous narratives, i.e. the visual and verbal. It happens in a way that the translator finds himself/herself obliged to put into practice translation strategies capable of transmitting the information contained in each narrative and each code (Chaume, 2004).

Georgakopoulou (2003) analyzed reduction in subtitling from a dual perspective. On the one hand, he systematically analyzed the percentage of reduction in subtitling in different film genres and established the extent to which filmic characteristics may determine the degree of reduction in a film. This is achieved by using the subtitle files of English films subtitled into Greek. On the other hand, he studied the effect of national characteristics on reduction levels in subtitling. He proposed a slimmed-down version of Lomheim's (1999) model of subtitling strategies, focusing on the horizontal axis of analysis, which refers to reduction/transfer/expansion percentages in subtitling. He concluded that reduction is the primary principle of subtitling due to space/time constraints of subtitles. Finally, he mentioned that a trend seems to prevail in subtitling from the point of view of the reduction levels employed by the subtitlers which is interrelated with the film genre, horror and action films having the lowest reduction rate, and romantic films having the highest rate. Greorgakopoulou also noted that the national characteristics of a country with respect to screen translation would influence its subtitle type in terms of reduction percentages.

Perego (2003) explored whether any explicitation actually occurs in subtitling or not. The corpus of this study consisted of two Hungarian films with Italian subtitles. The researcher used Klaudy's model of explicitation categories as the theoretical framework. She concluded that the complex polysemiotic texture of films with subtitles has a crucial impact on explicitation. It fostered subtitling-specific types of explicitation, i.e., those belonging to the channel-based category, which cannot be found in written texts. Furthermore, she pointed out that explicitation in subtitles is necessary in many cases to decode those paraverbal elements in the dialogue which would otherwise not be understood.

She considered addition and specification as the forms of explicitation which are of a great support to the viewer. These strategies drew the audience's attention to the most salient, significant and informative items of the subtitling block. Finally, she stated that the causes of any case of explicitation may be manifold.

Hasada (1997) examined aspects of Japanese cultural ethos as embedded in nonverbal behavior which is more important for the Japanese in comparison to the Anglo culture; for example, he compared eye-contact and the different attitudes towards it in Japanese and Anglo culture. He found that while English people have a strong social norm against staring, they place high value on eye-contact to show "politeness" to the other person. The results showed that Americans feel uneasy because the Japanese avoid eye-contact, as they in turn feel uneasy if someone's eyes are fixed on them, this being in conflict with the Japanese custom of 'bowing', where one lowers the head so that the eyes cannot meet. Another example is the interpretation of smiling and laughter. In Japan, laughter is felt to have the potential of hurting other people's feelings, and only children are allowed to laugh freely. The most agreeable face is the 'smiling' face, whereby the Japanese smile (for Westerners often "inscrutable") can often actually mask negative feelings or signalize a request for a favor(Hasada,1997). The differing associations evoked by the semantic field *smile* and the matching items in Japanese would be a basic problem in translation.

**METHODS**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strategies and shifts used to codify nonverbal information in subtitling from English into Persian using Perego's (2003) model. For this purpose, 20 English films along with their Persian translation in the form of subtitles were selected as the corpus for this study. The films were among different genres by different directors. The logic for choosing these films was to have a richer diversity of topics and content that would provide a larger variety of nonverbal elements. The list of the selected films with their detailed characteristics is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.**
*Detailed characteristics of the 20 selected films*

| Name | Year of Production | Director | Subtitling Company/Subtitler |
|---|---|---|---|
| Triple 9 | 2016 | John Hillcoat | Kiarash |
| Zootopia | 2016 | Byron Hovard | Amir Tahmasbi |
| The gift | 2015 | Joel Edgerton | 9movie |
| Transporter | 2015 | CammileDelamarre | Arian Drama |
| Revenant | 2015 | Alejandro G | Arian Drama |
| Extraction | 2015 | Steven Miller | HoseinGhazinoor |
| Solace | 2015 | AfonsoPoyart | 9movie |
| The big short | 2015 | Adam McKay | HD Navid |
| Sicario | 2015 | Denis Villeneuve | Amir Tahmasbi |
| Spectre | 2015 | Sam Mendes | Notion |
| The Martian | 2015 | Ridley Scott | MeisamTatari |
| Wild card | 2015 | Simon West | 9movie |
| Mission impossible | 2015 | Christopher Quarrie | MeisamTatari |
| Need for speed | 2014 | Scott Waugh | Arian Drama |
| Noah | 2014 | Darren Aronofsky | Ali Rashidaei |
| World war Z | 2013 | Mark Forster | Arian Drama |
| The raven | 2012 | James Mc Teigue | Farsi Subtitle |
| Adjustment bureau | 201 | George Nolfi | 9movie |
| In time | 2011 | Andrew Niccol | MojtabaAmirkhani |
| Unknown | 2011 | Jaume Collet | KiarashGorgani |

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## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employed Perego's (2003) model as the theoretical framework. In her study, Perego aimed to explore whether any explicitation actually occurs in subtitling or not. For this purpose, she investigated two Hungarian films with Italian subtitles. She identified five semiotic shifts which influence the translator's choices and can make the translation more explicit and lead to the codification of nonverbal messages. i.e., those belonging to the channel-based category, which cannot be found in written texts:

1. A shift from the paralinguistic to the verbal dimension. Paralanguage is a term for both the auditory, nonverbal elements and the non-auditory, non-verbal elements which make human verbal communication complete, natural, and non-artificial. It includes prosody and intonation, as well as kinesics and proxemics, essential elements in communication, given their pragmatic and emotive functions and their power in conveying the speaker's communicative intentions.

2. A diamesic shift, that is, the switch from the spoken to the written language, the shift from the oral code, a language written to be spoken and different to the natural spoken language to the written code. Subtitles are subject to the rules of written language and although they often have to maintain a certain degree of brevity, they are usually very precise and cohesive (Parmiggiani, 2002). According to Perego (2003), subtitles show many features typical of written language. The diamesic shift can be identified through these features including: conciseness, lack of redundancy, or at least notably less than in spoken language, high degree of textual organization, accurate information planning, high informativity, explicitness in developing argumentations, excellent chaining of sentences, meaningful use of punctuation, high degree of cohesion and coherence, thanks to the extensive use of deictic and anaphoric referential elements, disambiguation of pronominal forms, specification of referents, specific and accurate lexical choices, and reconstruction of elliptical forms. Written language is far less elliptical than spoken language, which explains the need for written sentences to be as complete and unequivocal as possible, where nothing is left unsaid and subtitlers explicitly rely on their knowledge of the overall plot of the film.

3. A shift from the image to verbal language. It can be identified in the cases that translator has verbalized information in image or film frame.

4. A shift from sound effects to verbal language. Sound effects provide the grounds for the insertion of the new element in the subtitle.

She pointed out that explicitation in subtitles is necessary in many cases to decode those nonverbal elements in the dialogue which would otherwise not be understood. She proposed three forms of explicitation that actively participate in the codification of nonverbal information which are as below:

**Addition:** is the insertion of linguistic elements absents in the original.

**Specification:** operates at the lexical level of language and involves substituting a lexical unit in the ST with a different one in the TT that is more precise and specific in nature.

**Reformulation:** operates at the textual level and involves substituting a sentence or phrase (in the loose sense of any part of a sentence) with a more informative sentence or phrase.

She considered addition and specification as

the forms of explicitation which are of a great support to the viewer. They drew the audience attention to the most salient, significant, and informative items of the subtitling block. Finally, she stated that the causes of any case of explicitation may be manifold.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The films as well as their subtitles were examined and nonverbal elements of the films and the shifts and strategies used in the subtitles were identified. The data were descriptively and qualitatively analyzed. The strategies were categorized based on Perego's (2003) model of subtitling strategies. Finally, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the collected data and to determine the most frequently used strategies and shifts in the subtitles.

After analyzing the data, the frequency and percentage of the shifts and strategies used in subtitling from English to Persian, were summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.**

*Frequency and percentage of shifts and strategies used in the films*

| StrategiesShifts | Addition | Percentage (%) | Specification | Percentage (%) | Reformulation | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Diamesic shift | 17 | 30.4 | 12 | 21.5 | 4 | 7.2 |
| Paralanguage to verbal language | 1 | 1.8 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1.8 |
| Image to verbal language | 8 | 14.3 | 9 | 16 | 2 | 3.4 |
| Sound to verbal language | 1 | 1.8 | 1 | 1.8 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 56 | 48.3 | 22 | 39.3 | 7 | 12.4 |

As shown in Table 2, in diamesic shift, among all strategies used in the subtitling from English to Persian, addition (n=17) was the most frequent one and reformulation (n=4) was the least frequent one. The frequency of specification was 12. In the shift from paralanguage to verbal language, the frequency of addition (n=1) and reformulation (n=1) was the same and these strategies had the most frequency while specification (n=0) was not used in this shift and is considered as the least frequent strategy. It was also revealed that in the shift from image to verbal language, specification (n=9) was the most frequently used strategy while addition (n=8) and reformulation (n=2) were the least frequently used ones, respectively. And in the last shift, shift from sound to verbal language, the frequency of addition (n=1) and specification (n=1) was the same and these strategies were considered as the most frequent strategies while reformulation (n=0) was not applied in the subtitling and considered as the least frequently used one.

Percentages of the strategies used for codifying nonverbal elements in the Persian subtitling of the English films are presented in Figure 1.
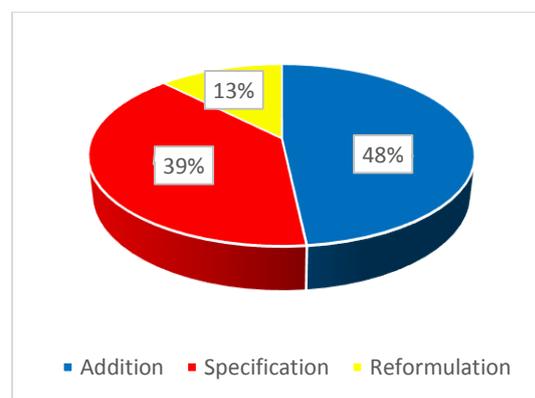


*Figure 1. Percentages of the strategies used in Persian subtitling of the English films.*

As shown in Figure 1, addition (48%) and specification (39%) have respectively the highest frequency and reformulation (13%) has the lowest frequency in the Persian subtitling of the English films.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to determine the translation strategies used for the codification of nonverbal elements in subtitling English films into Persian. More specifically, it was intended to find out to what extent the shifts and strategies proposed by Perego (2003) were applicable in the English movies subtitled into Persian. For this purpose, Perego's model was applied to 20 English films and the obtained results were analyzed.

The results show that all shifts proposed by Perego (2003) were applied for the codification of nonverbal elements in the subtitling from English into Persian. In shift from the paralinguistic (prosody, intonation, kinesics and proxemics) to the verbal dimension, addition (1.8%) and reformulation (1.8%) were the most frequent strategies but no case of specification (0%) was reported. It shows that in the shifts from paralinguistic to the verbal dimension, there was no need to use specification because there was no difference in paralinguistic elements between English and Persian languages.

In diamesic shift, which is the switch from the spoken to the written language, addition (30.4%) was the most frequent strategy and reformulation (4%) was the least frequent one for the codification of nonverbal elements. It reveals the need for more insertion of linguistic elements absent in the English films in order to codify the nonverbal elements in the subtitling.

In shift from the image to verbal language, which is the verbalization of images, specification (14.3%) was the most frequent strategy and reformulation (3.4%) was the least frequent one used for the codification of nonverbal elements. It shows that due to some cultural differences between English and Persian languages, there was more need to transfer the meaning of English images in the film through specification.

And in shift from sound to verbal language, addition (1.8%) and specification (1.8%) were the most frequent strategies and no case of reformulation (0%) was observed in the codification of nonverbal elements in the subtitling. It seems that for codification of nonverbal elements there was no need for reformulation because the sounds in English and Persian seems to have the same effect but in two cases, addition and specification were required.

Generally, addition (48%) was the most frequent strategy and reformulation (13%) was the least frequent one used for the codification of nonverbal elements in subtitling 20 English films from English into Persian. Therefore, it is concluded that due to some cultural differences, there is a need to use more addition to codify the nonverbal elements in the subtitling from English into Persian. It was also concluded that the strategies proposed by Perego (2003) are applicable to the codification of nonverbal elements in subtitling English films into Persian.

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