



Lost in Translation or Getting the Joke? A Comparative Study of Dubbing and Subtitling Humor in English Movies on an Iranian VOD Platform

Narges Sardabi¹, Amir Ghajarieh^{2*}, Maryam Poursadr³

¹Assistant Professor, English Language Department, Language Center, Ershad Damavand University, Tehran, Iran

^{2*}Associate Professor, English Language Department, Language Center, Ershad Damavand University, Tehran, Iran

³Master of Translation Studies, English Language Department, Language Center, Ershad Damavand University, Tehran, Iran

Received: April 13, 2024

Accepted: June 12, 2024

Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the strategies utilized by translators in translating humor from English into Persian in dubbed and subtitled movies. To achieve this goal, a corpus consisting of 9 reference comedy movies and their corresponding dubbed and subtitled translations in Persian were selected from the Iranian VOD platform, Filimo. The present study is a mixed-methods research that adopts a quantitative-qualitative approach to analyze the strategies used in translating humor from English into Persian in dubbed and subtitled movies on Filimo. In this study, a total of 100 instances of humor were selected and analyzed using Marta Mateo's (1995) humor model. The results were interpreted through frequency counts, and a comparison was made between the strategies used in dubbing and subtitling. Based on the results, it appears that the most commonly used strategies for translating humor in both dubbing and subtitling are literal translation and equivalent effect, which were used in approximately 60 percent of the instances. This suggests that these strategies are preferred by translators in rendering humor in English movies into Persian. However, one of the main findings of the study is that some of Mateo's (1995) strategies for translating humor were not applied at all, and in some cases, they were consistently ignored. This suggests that there may be limitations to the existing strategies for translating humor and that further research is needed to explore more effective and comprehensive strategies for translating humor in audiovisual media.

Keywords: Audiovisual Translation, Dubbing, Humor, Subtitling, VOD

INTRODUCTION

Audiovisual translation (AVT) serves as a means of communicating not only news and culture, but also joy and fun to people all over the world. Venuti (1995) explains that "translation is a process in which the signifying chain that constitutes the text in the source language is replaced by a signifying chain in the target language provided by the translator on the basis of an interpretation" (p. 17). However,

when translating films from different cultures, it is not always easy to replace the signifiers of one language with those of another, as this can lead to strange or unnatural content. A translation is essentially a reproduction of another work, and it is crucial to consider the intended audience, its age, culture, society and limitations when creating the translated product. AV products often contain idioms, slang, humor and other language-specific elements that cannot be translated literally.

*Corresponding Author's Email:
ghajarieh.amir@gmail.com



Audiovisual translation (AVT) is a means of conveying joy, fun, but also messages and culture to people all over the world. However, when it comes to translating films with different cultures, it is not always easy to translate the signifiers of one language into those of another, as this can result in strange or unnatural content. As the translation is a reproduction of another work, it is important to take into account the age, culture and society of the target audience, as well as the limitations of the translation process. Any audiovisual product (AV) may contain idioms, slang, humor and other elements that cannot be translated literally.

The issue becomes even more complicated when considering whether subtitling or dubbing is the best method of translation. This debate still has several supporters on both sides, with advantages and disadvantages for each. When creating subtitles, translators have to develop text that matches the spoken language and visuals. Subtitles have many constraints, one of which is the combination of reading a written text while watching images at a certain speed. They usually contain two lines of thirty-two characters each and are synchronized with the images. The duration of the subtitle depends on the speed of the dialogue and the estimated reading speed. The duration is also affected by the presence of closed subtitles, which can be removed by the viewer if unnecessary. There seems to be a general "6 seconds rule" (Diaz Cintas & Remael, 2007, p. 21), according to which two lines can be read in six seconds, with the exception of songs, where the subtitles can stay on the screen for longer.

On the other hand, Bassnett (2013) claims that dubbing is a form of political censorship because the original soundtrack is never heard, unlike subtitling, which allows for comparison and is more democratic. Moreover, one of the challenging aspects of dubbing is the time constraint and the consideration of intonation, rhythm, and pitch. In dubbing, the dubbing team need to produce the same amount of language in terms of time (no less, no more) with appropriate intonation and other prosodic features of the source text.

The translation of audio-visual media involves various dimensions, each using different

methods based on the nature of the program and the goals of the programmers. Audiovisual translation (AVT) has its roots in the history of cinema, from the silent era to the complex techniques used today, including sound, subtitles, dubbing, multiple-language versions, and multilingual scripts. Although AVT is considered a transparent role in translation studies, it has been the subject of numerous investigations into its different features (Rezvani Sichani et al., 2023; Sadeghpour, 2021; Rezvani Sichani et al., 2021; Khodabandeh, 2019; Rezvani Sichani, & Afrouz 2019; Khoshsaligheh & Ameri, 2016). Toury (2004) notes that there is a substantial body of literature on humor in AVT.

Humor is a complex topic that has been explored by scholars in education and translation studies around the world. According to Dehjalali and Izadpanah (2017), humor is difficult to define or achieve, yet it is a global occurrence in everyday communication, albeit subjective and highly personal. Nevertheless, the theoretical framework for humor suggests that an examination of humor may lead to other discoveries, such as the link between humor and other aspects of personality (Freud, 1950), which can help individuals understand other facets of themselves. Moreover, humor is one of the fascinating categories of language that deals with cultural, political, and social issues in a subtle way and can be used to avoid criticism and filters in society, as well as to establish a close relationship with the audience. In fact, humor can serve several crucial functions during communication. The related issues to the notion of humor are also integrated.

Despite the importance, challenges, and complexities related to translation, dubbing, and subtitling, there are very few studies in Iran investigating the strategies used by Persian translators to dub and subtitle English movies while also considering the translation of humor. Such a study would be valuable to the existing literature on humor translation, particularly in movies, and could contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and strategies involved in translating humor in multimedia contexts.

Research Questions

In line with the purposes of the study, the following questions are proposed:

RQ1. *What are the most frequent strategies employed in the Persian dubbed versions of 9 English comedies to convey represented humor?*

RQ2. *What are the most frequent strategies employed in the Persian subtitled versions of 9 English comedies to convey represented humor?*

RQ3. *What are the recurring themes identified in the interviews with various translators concerning the translation of humor in the context of dubbing films?*

RQ4. *What are the recurring themes identified in the interviews with various translators concerning the translation of humor in the context of subtitling films?*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on subtitling and dubbing preferences

In Iran, cartoons and films in other languages are usually dubbed into Farsi. But more and more people in Iran are watching subtitles instead, especially for shows that are not yet dubbed, that take too long to be dubbed, or that are heavily altered after dubbing (Khoshsaligheh et al. 2019).

One of the most prominent works in typology of subtitling was that of Khoshsaligheh et al. (2020). The researchers attempted to provide an overview of subtitling activities in Iranian media, dividing varieties of subtitling into intralingual subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH), interlingual subtitling for foreign films, and interlingual subtitling for Iranian films. The study proposed a culture specific lens to analyze subtitles.

A recurring theme in the literature on translation of subtitles is that with the burgoing effect of social media, the audience tend to come across a wide range of non-official or fan-subbed audio-visual translation (12Khoshsaligheh et al). Some studies have also confirmed that viewers respond positively to subtitled material (e.g. Orrego-Carmona, 2016).

In addition to subtitling, dubbing is also a focus of AVT research in Iran. Khoshsaligheh

(2022) gave an overview of dubbing activities in the Iranian context. The study presented a new diagram that breaks dubbing into three categories: non-professional, kind-of- professional and professional. One major change in this typology was the professional dubbing done by private companies, including overseas studios and video-on-demand (VOD) providers.

The latest research done in Iranian context by Ameri and Khoshsaligheh (2022) found that young Iranian viewers prefer subtitling over dubbing. As such, the quality of both subtitles and dubbing should be analyzed in terms of the strategies used to effectively render the subtleties of language. This includes the kind of humor that goes beyond the literal interpretation of words and requires an understanding that extends beyond the word level.

Studies done on audiovisual translation of humor

Studies have shown that the translation of humor in audiovisual media is complex. For instance, Zolczer (2016) notes translation of humor becomes complicated in the case of language- and culture-specific elements and that a difference in comedic effect between dubbed and subtitled versions often arises from the inherent limitations associated with each mode of translation.

In one of the most relevant studies to the current investigation, Sadeghpour and Omar (2015) examined how humor is realized in Persian comedy films with English subtitles. Using the film "Lizard", the researchers identified humorous moments and categorized them based on established humor classifications. They then analyzed the translation strategies used to determine how well the subtitles conveyed the humor. The study found that generally understandable humor was translated well, while jokes that relied on linguistic or cultural references were more challenging. Literal translation proved to be the most common approach, but the study suggested using creative strategies that take into account the visual aspects of the film and potentially domesticate the humor for the target audience to maximize its effectiveness.

In the scientific study by Çakıroğlu and Yılmaz (2021), the subtleties of the reproduction of

audiovisual humor through subtitling were. The research focused on the American television series "The Big Bang Theory" and specifically examined the comedic content of 23 episodes of the third season and their subsequent translation into Turkish subtitles. The researchers used a methodological framework that involved the identification of comedic constructs and the subsequent evaluation of the translation strategies used to preserve humor in the target language. The results of the study suggest that humor in the original relies predominantly on linguistic constructs and the application of superiority and incongruity theories. The study concludes that the translation was carried out with a high degree of efficiency, as evidenced by the successful delivery of the intended humor in the subtitles.

Most recently, a study by Ghajari et al. (2024) investigated visual humor in translated audiovisual materials with a focus on puns. The results showed that lexical-semantic puns and no puns were used when humor was present in the source text.

METHOD

The present study is descriptive in nature and uses descriptive translation studies to analyze the strategies used in translating humor in dubbed and subtitled English films on Iranian VOD platform (Filimo). Descriptive translation is "the use of a description to translate a term or phrase in the source by characterizing it rather than translating it directly" (Darwish 2010, p. 142 12). However, there are other ways of looking at descriptive translation; for example, some sources define the term from the perspective of its social functions (Darwish 2010). As Bazzi explains, descriptive translation can be identified as a tool "used to faithfully represent the values, hegemonic views or ideological positions of the participants in the target text (Bazzi 2009, p. 201).

Two triangulation approaches were used in the study: triangulation by the researcher and triangulation of the data collection. In investigator triangulation, a research assistant analyzed and coded the translation strategies used together with the researcher, and the degree of agreement between the two coders was considered

inter-coder reliability. To triangulate the data collection, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with a group of 12 translators to determine their attitudes towards the challenges of dubbing and subtitling films. The interview transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the present study is based on Martínez-Sierras (2005). He presented a taxonomy of humoristic elements that includes the following.

- a. Community and institutional elements, which refer to cultural or intertextual features rooted in and associated with a particular culture.
- b. Community-sense-of-humor elements whose themes seem to be more popular in certain communities than others, an idea that does not imply cultural specificity but rather preference.
- c. Linguistic elements based on linguistic features. They can be explicit or implicit, spoken or written.
- d. Visual elements that involve a distinction between the humor generated by what we can see on the screen and the elements that are actually a visually encoded version of a linguistic element.
- e. Graphic elements: This type includes the humor that results from a written message inserted into an image on the screen.
- f. Paralinguistic elements: Both quantitatively and qualitatively, paralinguistic features are so significant that they form a category of their own.
- g. Unmarked (humorous) elements represent miscellaneous instances that are not easily categorized as one of the other categories but are, nevertheless, Now let's move on to the final category of humor. These are sounds that can be humorous on their own or in combination with other sounds. They can be found explicitly and acoustically in the soundtrack and special effects when they contribute to the humor (Martínez-Sierra, 2005; pp. 291-292 14)

Once we have identified the different types of humor, we will apply Mateo's (1995) model of humor translation to both the subtitles and the dubbings. Mateo (1995) 15 proposed a list of possible strategies for translating humor, which are as follows:

1. ST humor becomes TT humor with literal translation
2. ST humor becomes TT humor with 'equivalent effect' translation
3. ST humor is enhanced in TT with some word / expression
4. ST humor is replaced by a 'synonym' in TT
5. ST humor becomes TT sarcasm (i.e., more overt criticism)
6. The hidden meaning of ST humor comes to the surface in TT (no humor in TT)
7. ST humor is explained in footnote in TT
8. ST humor has literal translation with no humor in TT
9. Humorous ST is completely deleted in TT
10. No humor in ST becomes humor in TT

Corpus

The corpus of the study consisted of dubbed English movies with Persian subtitles available on the Iranian VOD platform called Filimo.

Several criteria were considered when selecting the movies for this study. First, only movies released between 2018 and 2021 were chosen. Second, the movies were gathered from Filimo, which is an official Iranian VOD platform. Third, the movies with a high frequency of humor words were preferred. Fourth, American and English movies in the comic genre were chosen.

The corpus of the study consisted of movies from three different genres, namely comedy-family, comedy-romance, and comedy-action. In order to ensure the quality of the translations and to bring novelty to the field of translation studies, an attempt was made to select movies that had been less censored and were more up-to-date and had not been investigated in other studies. Most importantly, the quality of the new dubbed and subtitled movies in Filimo was considerably better than that of older movies.

Godmothered was chosen because it was released in 2020, both versions of it were on Filimo and it was a movie with a high frequency of humor words.

'Yes, Day' was released in 2021 and is one of the new films in the comedy genre. It was shown on Filimo in both the dubbed and subtitled versions and had a high frequency of humorous words.

Playing with Fire is an American comedy movie that was released in 2019 and both dubbed and subtitled versions of it were presented on Filimo. Moreover, it was a movie with a high frequency of humor words.

On the Rocks was chosen because it was released in 2020, both versions of it were on Filimo and it was a movie with a high frequency of humor words.

Last Christmas was an American movie in comedy genre and was released in 2019. Both dubbed and subtitled versions of it were on Filimo and it had a high frequency of humor words.

Emma is an American comedy movie that was released in 2020 and both dubbed and subtitled versions of it were presented on Filimo. Moreover, it was a movie with a high frequency of humor words.

Bad Boys for Life was chosen because it was released in 2020, both versions of it were on Filimo and it was a comedy-action movie with a high frequency of humor words.

Stuber was an American movie in comedy-action genre and was released in 2019. Both dubbed and subtitled versions of it were on Filimo and it had a high frequency of humor words.

Jumanji: The Next Level is an American comedy movie that was released in 2019 and both dubbed and subtitled versions of it were presented on Filimo. Moreover, it was a movie with a high frequency of humor words.

Table 1
The Corpus of the Study

	Genre	Movie	Year
1	Comedy-family	Godmothered	2020
		Yes Day	2021
		Playing with Fire	2019
2	Comedy-romance	On the Rocks	2020
		Last Christmas	2019
		Emma	2020
3	Comedy-action	Bad Boys for Life	2020

Materials

The research involved interviews with 10 people, focusing on 10 questions that explored participants' views on translation tactics for comedic elements (such as irony, satire, sarcasm and wordplay) in English films. It also explored the difficulties translators face when working on humor in dubbed and subtitled versions of films. To confirm the validity and reliability of the interview, three language specialists assessed the questions.

In addition, an inter-coder reliability test was conducted to determine the appropriateness of categorizing the themes. The reliability index revealed an agreement of 0.79 between the researcher and an assistant who categorized the themes, indicating a high level of consistency in the analysis.

Procedure

To achieve the objectives of the study, the corpus was carefully examined to identify and locate humorous elements according to Martínez-Sierra's (2005) taxonomy of humorous elements. The Persian equivalents of the original text were identified in the translation of the movies. The subtitled and dubbed versions were selected and contrasted with the originals on Filimo to identify the humorous phrases and expressions in the translation that pose the greatest challenge for Iranian translators in audiovisual translation.

The original movie scripts were also used alongside the original and dubbed versions of the movies to have better control over the movies and to identify any deficiencies in their translations. Additionally, four AVT professional translators were interviewed for each section, dubbing and subtitling, to assess the challenges

faced by translators in translating humor in audiovisual media. Their comments provided valuable insights into the difficulties encountered in this area of translation.

Data Analysis Procedure

Humors from dubbed and subtitled movies were analyzed using Mateo's (1995) **Error! Bookmark not defined.** humor model. The results were interpreted through frequency count, and a comparison was made between the dubbed and subtitle strategies. Thematic analysis was used by the researchers for interview data, consisting of different phases: a) being familiar with the data, b) creating initial codes, c) collating codes with supporting data, d) grouping codes into themes, and e) reviewing and revising themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The first step of the analysis consisted of transcribing the audio files of the study and observing the meanings and patterns they contained. The second step was to create a set of initial codes representing the observed meanings and patterns. The third step was to group all the excerpts that were assigned to a particular code. The fourth step was to sort the codes into possible themes based on the initial codes. The themes were then reviewed and revised in the fifth step. Prior to data analysis, the narratives were anonymized and each reference to the participants or the content of the interview was assigned a code. To ensure the trustworthiness of inferences, two techniques were employed: member check and referential adequacy. Member check involved asking participants and other members of the social scene to verify the accuracy of themes, interpretations, and conclusions. If participants agreed with the investigators'

interpretations, it provided evidence for the trustworthiness of the results (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009). Three participants were shown the final themes and subthemes, and they agreed with the interpretations, establishing the trustworthiness of the collected data and interpretations.

Referential adequacy was used as the second strategy to assess and improve the quality of inferences. This technique involved setting aside a part of the raw data and analyzing it to evaluate the quality of inferences. The researcher returned to the set-aside data to compare it with the developed themes to ensure that the conclusions were grounded in the data. Referential adequacy is similar to QUAN statistical analyses, where researchers split their sample and run the analysis on the first half for exploratory purposes and then on the second half for confirmatory purposes.

RESULTS

In the study, 100 examples of humor were selected from the original film scripts and 10 different translation strategies were applied to them. The analysis revealed that while all humor translation strategies were used, certain types (such as footnotes and sarcasm) were used less frequently. On the other hand, strategies such as direct translation and achieving an equivalent effect were frequently used in both translation methods.

Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage of occurrence for each humorous element. The table shows that, in terms of the linguistic feature of the source text, 12% of the entire humorous elements were Homophony, 27% were due to Phonetic similarity, 15% were Sub-sentential utterances, 37% were related to syntactic organization, and finally, 9% were polysemy.

Table 2

Frequency and Percentage of humorous elements in the Source Text

humorous element	Frequency	Percentage
Homophony	12	12%
Phonetic similarity	27	27%
Sub-sentential utterance	15	15%
Syntactic organization	37	37%
polysemy	9	9%

The following diagram shows the level of Community-Sense-of-Humor is more than other

types of items. Then, concepts of Linguistic Elements are the most frequent humorous elements.

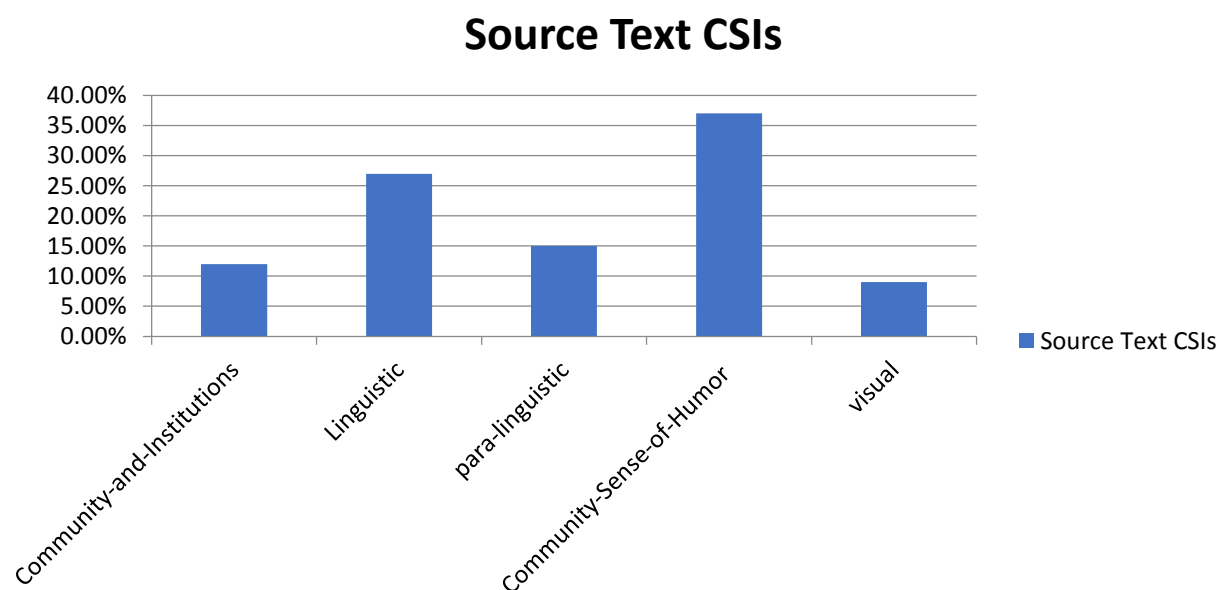


Figure 1
Diagram for source text humorous elements

The usage of humorous items in the source text revealed that out of the entire humorous elements, there were 12 related to Community-and-Institutions. Regarding Linguistic Elements, there were 12 items related to food, 3 to clothes, 3 to houses, 2 to transport,

2 to objects, 2 to measurement, and 3 to places. For organizations, customs, and ideas, there were three main categories, which showed 31 items for social customs, 5 items for legal ideas, and 10 items for religious concepts (see Table 3).

Table 3
Classification of 100 humorous elements

Cultural Category	Classification	Number of Items
Community-and-Institutions Elements	Ecological places	12
	Food	12
	Clothes	3
Linguistic Elements	Houses	3
	Transport	2
	Objects	2
	Measurement	2
	Places	3
Paralinguistic Elements	Work and leisure	15
Organization, Community-Sense-of-Humor	Political	12
	Religious	17
	Activities	8
Visual		9

The two translators used translation strategies differently. Result of the frequency

and percentage of strategies are depicted in table 4.

Table 4
The frequency of the application of humorous elements translation strategies across dubbing and subtitling

Strategy		Frequency			
		Dubbing		Subtitling	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Mateo's humorous element Translation Strategies	Literal translation	22	22%	34	34%
	Equivalent effect	36	36%	30	30%
	Enhanced with some word / expression	10	10%	9	9%
	No humor in ST becomes humor in TT	12	12%	6	6 %
	No humor in TT	8	8%	5	5%
	Deletion	0	0%	5	5%
	Literal translation with no humor in TT	6	6%	1	1%
	Sarcasm (more overt humor)	0	0%	3	3%
	Footnote	0	0%	3	3%
	Replaced by a 'synonym'	6	6%	4	4%
Sum		100			

As shown above, the frequency and distribution of translation strategies in subtitling are similar to dubbing with minor differences. In subtitling, the most commonly used translation strategies are functional equivalence with 34 items (34%), equivalent effect with 30 items (30%), enhanced with some words/expressions

with 9 items (9%), cultural equivalence with 6 items (6%), no humor in TT with 5 items (5%), deletion with 5 items (5%), sarcasm with 3 items (3%), footnote with 3 items (3%), replaced by a 'synonym' with 4 items (3%), and literal translation with no humor in TT with 1 item (1%). The present study also revealed that functional

equivalence and equivalent effect are the most frequently used translation strategies in Subtitling.

In dubbing's translation, the most frequently used strategies are equivalent effect with 36 items (36%), functional equivalence with 22 items (22%), cultural equivalence with 12 items (12%), extended by some words/expressions with 10 items (10%), no humor in TT with 8 items (8%), ST literal translation without humor in TT with 6 items (6%) and replaced by a 'synonym' with 4 items (4%). The results thus show that the two most frequently used strategies in

dubbing are the equivalent effect and literal translation. The comparison of the application of translation strategies in subtitles and dubbing is illustrated in the following figure. In Subtitling, the three most commonly used strategies are Literal translation, Equivalent effect, and Enhanced with some words/expressions. On the other hand, the first three strategies in dubbing are equivalent effect, functional equivalence, and translating no humor in ST into humor in TT. Although there are some differences, they are not significant.

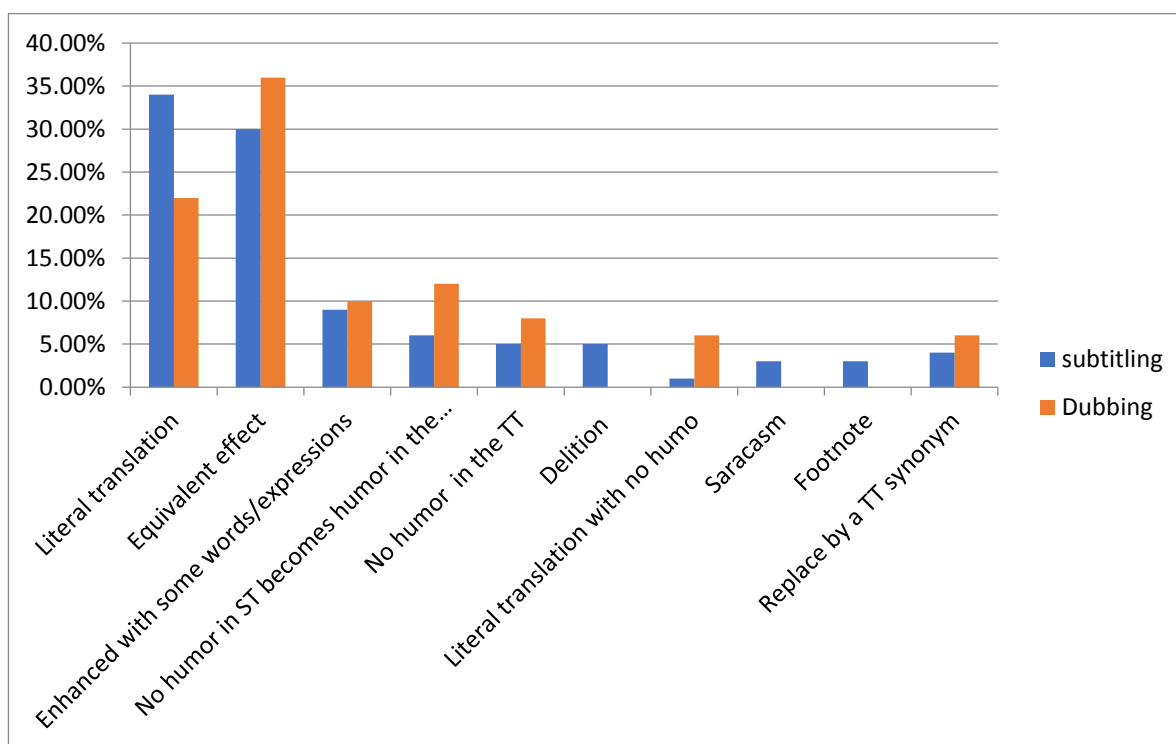


Figure 2
Comparison of translation strategies in subtitling and dubbing

Samples of Translation Strategies

In this section, we present one instance of each translation strategy type in dubbing and subtitling. The most frequent strategy in the corpus of this study was the equivalent effect. This strategy

maintains the sense of humor while avoiding literal and word-for-word translation. Examples of this strategy in both dubbed and subtitled versions of the corpus are extracted from the movie "On the Rocks" and are presented below as Example 1 and 2:

ST:

Doctor: I can't find any reason for this mysterious affliction. It's probably due to drinking".

Patient: In that case, I'll come back when you're damn well sober!

:TT (Dub)

دکتر: منشأ این درد رو دقیقاً نمیدونم چیه، اصلاً شرایط خوبی نیست.
بیمار: پس اجازه بدید من زمانی که شرایط خوب شد برگردم.

:TT (Sub)

دکتر: من دلیل این درد مزمن را نمی دونم چیه، اصلاً شرایط مساعدی ندارم.
بیمار: در این مورد، بگذارید شرایطم خوب شود تا برگردم.

In the example above, the translator was able to produce the same effect for the target language audience without using a literal translation. It appears that due to government restrictions on the use of alcohol in movies, the translator opted to change the humor while maintaining the equivalent effect. The same strategy was also used in the subtitling, where the translator changed the humor to achieve the

equivalent effect. Example (2) illustrates another instance of the equivalent effect strategy in subtitled movies.

In the above example, the source text relies on phonetic similarity for its humor. While the translator has tried to retain the corresponding effect, the original humor has not been retained. A literal translation of the text has been used in the subtitling.

ST:

Bartender: Hey! You're not going to leave that lying on the floor, are you?

The Drunk guy: it is not a lion, it's a dog.

TT (Dub)

متصدی بار: نمیخواهی این جنازه (خطاب به زرافه ای که بخاطر مستی کف سالن ولو شده بود) رو با خودت ببری؟
متصدی بار: نمیخواهی این فردی که روی زمین ولو شده است را تنها بگذاری؟
مرد مست: اون شیر نیست، سگه...

In the above example, the source text relies on phonetic similarity for its humor. While the translator has tried to retain the corresponding effect, the original humor has not been retained. A literal translation of the text has been used in the subtitling.

The next most common strategy in the corpus of this study was literal translation, where the humorous element is translated literally, which has the same effect for the target language audience. Example (3) from the film "Bad Boys for Life" shows an example of a literal translation in both the dubbed and subtitled versions.

ST:

I noticed that the doctor had given me a woman's ears; because I could hear everything, but I couldn't understand a thing!

TT (Dub)

حدس میزنم گوش یک خانم رو پیوند زده باشه چون همه چیز رو میشنیدم، ولی درک نمیکردم.

TT (Sub)

فهمیدم که اون گوش یک خانم بوده چون از لحاظ شنیداری مشکلی نداشتم، ولی هیچ درکی از شون نداشتم.

In the example above, the translators in both the dubbed and subtitled versions used a literal translation of the sentence, yet they were able to maintain the humorous sense of the original sentence.

The third most frequent strategy identified in the corpus of this study was enhancing the humor with additional words or expressions. This strategy appears to be mainly used to compensate for humorous elements that were lost during the translation process. Example (4) from movie "Last Christmas" illustrates an instance of this strategy in the dubbed version of the movie:

ST:

[...]

A: When will you make the call?

B: never ever

TT (Dub)

A: کی تماس میگیری؟

B: وقت گل نی!

ST (Sub)

A: کی تماس میگیری؟

B: وقت گل نی!

In the example above, the translator added a Persian expression that was not present in the source text to create a humorous effect for the audience.

The next most frequent strategy identified in the corpus of this study was enhancing the humor with additional words or expressions. This strategy was observed almost equally in both the dubbed and subtitled versions, with 10 instances in the dubbed version and nine instances in the subtitled version. Example (5) from movie “Stuber” demonstrates an instance of humor enhancement in the dubbed version:

ST:	:TT (Dub)
A: Is it [the cockroach]	
dead?	A: مُرد؟
B: <u>I think so</u>	: فکر میکنم خوابیده باشه.
	:TT (Sub)
	A: مُرد؟
	B: فکر کنم خوابیده باشه.

In the example above, interlocutor B uses a subtle form of humor. However, both the dubbed and subtitled versions have added words to enhance the quality of the humor. In the source text, there is no reference to the 'sleeping of the cockroach,' and the translator had to compensate for any humorous elements that may have been lost during the translation process. There were also similar instances of humor enhancement observed in the Persian subtitles of the movies.

Results of the interviews with the translators A researcher made interview with 18 items was utilized. It included questions related to their opinions about the strategies adopted by the translators when translating humor (Irony, Satire, Sarcasm, and Wordplays) in English films and the challenges encountered by translators in translating the humor in dubbed and subtitled films. In order to answer the second research question, the qualitative analysis of the participants' responses to the related open-ended questions of the interview was conducted using theme-based analysis. Two general steps were followed, namely, data coding and data analysis. Coding is about developing concepts from the raw data. The researcher coded and analyzed the data inductively. The researcher then analyzed the data using the thematic framework. The translators' answers were marked and identified by their pseudonyms (T1, T2, T3,...). A thematic analysis was carried out in

this study. This required the transcription of the interview recordings and the subsequent coding phases. First, the researcher read and re-read the transcripts to identify possible themes. In the second stage of analysis, the researcher reviewed these initial codes. In particular, she considered how she could maintain the diversity of the initial codes while creating overarching elements, i.e. higher level sub-themes. In the third stage of analysis, the researcher identified quotes that matched the overarching themes. The researcher then reviewed the themes before defining and naming them. Once the themes were finalized, the writing of the report began.

By interviewing some translators regarding the challenges of humor translation in subtitled and dubbed films, some results were obtained. They believed that what distinguishes AVT (Audiovisual translation) from other types of translations is due to textual constraints. They believed that translation of humor in subtitled and dubbed films is very challenging because of textual constraints imposed on the subtitles as a result of the visual context of the movie, including the necessity of reducing the original message. Some other translators believed that formal challenges are more important to translate humor in subtitled and dubbed films. They asserted that formal challenges include the time factor and the space factor (a maximum of two lines are permitted with a number of 35 characters in each). Particularly the time factor plays a vital role in the decision that translators make. Traditionally, 5-6 seconds have been considered sufficient for reading a two-liner. The other translators believed that problem with translating cultural references is decoding the ST meaning, as it is sometimes difficult to figure out the meaning of the ST subtitles. Another problem is sometimes the ambiguity, and lack of coherence of some verbal texts such as speeches, and which need to be rendered either faithfully (and hence the translation will sound ambiguous) or communicatively (and hence the translation will sound unfaithful to the ST). Other problems of translating cultural references include the emotive words, which need to be rendered alertly. In addition to this, cultural customs and traditions sometimes count a lot.

More specifically, T4 mentioned that “the main problem in translating a humor element as a culture-specific expression is that it might have an idiomatic meaning which should be memorized”. Meanwhile,

T1 stated that: The very name of humorous expressions as "cultural expressions" indicates the what and the why of their problem. They are simply difficult to comprehend and/or to translate because they are specific to a given culture in terms of their linguistic structure, semantic denotation and, more significantly, their socio-cognitive relevance.

Moreover, T7 quoted that: The main problem in translating humorous expressions is defining them. Most of the translators do not have a clear definition of humorous expressions and items which makes it difficult to recognize and understand and later render them in the second language.

For T10, the intended translators' inability to understand the background of the humorous expressions is one of the main problems. He added that: This is the core of the problem. When a translator does not know the background of the humorous element, then he will not understand its usage. The issue here is not the wording but it is the context itself. This is of course attributed to translators' weakness in English.

He added that in many cases the weak cultural background of the translators even in the Persian context makes them unable to guess the equivalent context.

T6 mentioned that: Translation trainees in Iran are generally weak in both English and Persian. Their world knowledge is also poor. Therefore, they have to take an entrance exam in which not only the two languages concerned should be tested but also their cultural and world knowledge.

He believed that translation should be studied by people who have encyclopedic knowledge. T6 also added that:

Culture-specific expressions, such as humorous terms, are naturally more difficult than ordinary plain-text expressions because they are deeply rooted in the culture and often do not have a literal meaning but an idiomatic one, and

they are usually underestimated by both translation teachers and trainees.

T9 emphasized the time and place constraints and claimed that: It should be noted that it is not only important to retain a full two-line subtitle for at least 6 seconds to ensure sufficient reading time, but also not to retain the same subtitle for more than 6 seconds, as this would lead to automatic re-reading of the subtitle, especially for fast readers.

By the same vein, T5 quoted that: Generally, the subtitles are placed in the center, at the bottom of the screen. There is a limitation of characters in a line with spaces and symbols. Moreover, you can place a limited number of characters in two lines. It is its maximum limit. Subtitle translation also has time restrictions.

T1 put focus on the contextual challenges and said that “lack of cultural awareness and lack of cultural interaction can stand behind these problems.” He gave the word "Donkey" as an example and explained that: In the Persian culture if you call someone a donkey, he will get upset and feel insulted because it has a bad connotation and it means idiot or stupid, while in the western culture the word donkey is used to describe a hard working person which is positive and respectful.

He added that lack of knowledge of translation strategies and theories among translators could also be one of the main reasons behind the problems they encounter. Meanwhile, the other translators stated that: The main reason is the lack of the translation students' communication with other cultures. People think that through technology the translator students are strongly in touch with the cultures of others, but as a matter of fact they are not. This makes them much behind understanding the cultural contexts of others.

According to the content analysis and thematic method, the following themes were extracted from the participants' responses to the open-ended questions.

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to investigate the strategies used by translators to translate humor (including Irony, Satire, Sarcasm, and Wordplays) in

English films into Persian on the VOD platform, based on Mateo's (1995) 15 model. The analysis revealed that literal translation was the most commonly used strategy for both dubbed and subtitled translations, accounting for 34% of subtitles and 22% of dubbings. This could be attributed to the fact that during the translation process, focusing solely on the meaning of the source language without considering its stylistic and figurative aspects often leads to the second strategy in Mateo's hierarchy, which is an easy way to overcome the challenge of translating humor. However, literal translation is not always effective in conveying the intended humorous effect and may even lead to confusion. Therefore, translators in this study used the "equivalent effect" strategy as an alternative to literal translation. This strategy was used almost equally in both subtitling and dubbing, accounting for 58% and 64% of humor translation strategies, respectively. In either form of translation, these two strategies combined made up more than half of the total strategies used.

Despite the potential ease of using the fourth strategy, Pun = zero, as a solution for translating puns, it appears that translators in the study avoided this strategy because generating new content could significantly alter the meaning of the source text, and such a task requires more than just translation skills from the translator. It would require the translator to be both an author and translator simultaneously, a combination of skills that few translators possess.

Two other strategies, the fifth strategy and the eighth strategy (Pun ST = Pun TT and editorial techniques, including footnotes), were not applied in either of the two translations. The absence of these two strategies seems reasonable considering that when the translator uses pun words from the source language without translating them (according to Delabastita's direct copy), they need to elaborate on them somewhere in the endnotes or footnotes (editorial techniques strategy). Therefore, when the translators did not apply the Pun ST = Pun TT strategy, there was no ambiguity for the target text reader that needed to be elaborated through the application of the eighth strategy.

Based on data analysis, it appears that linguistic-based humors (e.g. puns) were the most

difficult and detrimental to translation quality. As noted by Eslami-Rasekh & Ordudary (2002), the (un)translatability of aesthetic elements, particularly puns, depends on the similarity between the source language (SL) and target language (TL) systems. Due to the dissimilarity of Persian and English language and culture, these types of humor were not effectively translated to the target language.

This study's results differ from Eslami Rasekh and Ordudary's (2002) findings on puns in English translations of Sa'di's *the Bustan*. Their study found that the most frequent strategy used by English translators was zero translation/omission. However, this study's data analysis showed that only five instances of humor were deleted in the subtitles, and none were deleted in the dubbed version.

Some previous studies do not contradict the findings of this study. For instance, the study done by Mohammadsalari et al. (2014) on the Persian translation of puns in *Alice Adventures in Wonderland* found that Persian translators used the six strategies proposed by Mateo (1995) 15 with pun to non-pun being the most frequent. Similarly, this study's results showed that pun to non-pun was the most commonly employed strategy. It is worth noting that pun to non-pun does not necessarily mean a translation from humor to non-humor. Rather, pun-based humor was mostly translated into non-pun-based humor.

The findings of this study are consistent with the views of Shamsaefard et al. (2013), who observed that translators often opt for literal translation to preserve the figurative language of the source text, particularly in creative constructs.

The results of this study indicate a high frequency of literal translation, as is also the case in other studies on the translation of puns in the Iranian context, such as Ghajarieh et al. (2024) 19. This clearly shows that when translating puns and humor in literal translation, translators avoid translating the message of the source text's message. Pierini (2007) also supports this idea, suggesting that the more divergent the humorous effect is from the current language use, the stronger the case for literal translation to puzzle the target reader in the

same way as the source reader. Furthermore, the present study aligns with Nourizadeh's (2003) examination of different techniques for translating figurative speech. Nourizadeh found that the most commonly employed technique, by both M.A. and B.A. translators, was equivalent and literal translation.

The interviews with the translators show that their views are in line with the conclusions of Ameri and Khoshsaligheh's 2020 study. According to this earlier research, younger viewers prefer subtitles to dubbing, especially when the translation is not done by professionals. The subtitlers interviewed said that their own preferences and the audience's reactions tend to favor subtitles, and they even prefer to watch comic scenes with subtitles.

In addition, the results of this study confirm the finding of Zolczer (2016)¹⁶ that in certain cases the amount of humor varies due to dubbing and subtitling limitations. Ultimately, in light of various research findings in the Iranian context, including those of Sadeghpour and Omar (2015)¹⁷, it is clear that the strategies of domestication and recreation are crucial for subtitling and dubbing translation when it comes to the subtleties of humor. Drawing from its own empirical findings, this study re-emphasizes the importance of these approaches in translation.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the translation strategies used by translators for humor (including Irony, Satire, Sarcasm, and Wordplays) in English films that were dubbed or subtitled in Persian and presented on the VOD platform. To achieve this, the humorous elements were extracted using Martínez-Sierra's (2005) taxonomy of humor types. Subsequently, Mateo's (1995) model of humor translation was applied to both the subtitles and dubbing to analyze the translation strategies used.

Out of 100 instances of humor identified, the most frequent strategies employed in both subtitling and dubbing were literal translation and equivalent effect. These two strategies accounted for around 60 percent of all humorous items translated. The total number of translations and frequency of each specific strategy was

almost similar in both modes of translation. The remaining strategies were only used sporadically, with the sum of the four least frequent strategies in the dubbed mode at 12 items and for the subtitled mode at 11 items.

Despite the similarities mentioned above, there were also some differences between the two modes of translation. One of the main findings of the study was the deficiency of Mateo's (1995) strategies in translating humor, as some strategies were not applied at all. This finding was further validated by the fact that the absence of these strategies was not limited to one instance but observed in several instances. For example, in the dubbing process, no instances of "using footnotes" were observed, while there were three instances of it in subtitling. In contrast, there was no deletion in the dubbing, while five instances of deletion were spotted in subtitling.

This finding can be justified on two grounds. Firstly, in dubbing, the need for synchronicity between audio and video restricts the translator from deleting any humorous item, even if its translation would be strange and incomprehensible. Instead, the translator has to fill the gap created by the deletion of humor. Secondly, dubbing a movie is a more formal process that is sponsored by broadcasting companies, while subtitling is less formal, and some subtitlers undertake the task simply because of their interest, lack of experience, and poor payment. This leads them to feel free to delete items that they feel are untranslatable.

The process of data analysis revealed that the translation of language-based humor, especially pun humor, was the most challenging issue for translators in both modes of translation. However, the present study also found that pun is relatively translatable. This finding is in line with the proponents of pun translatability, such as Toury (1997) and Landheer (1989), who argue that languages share some common features and pun, as a universal feature of all languages, is translatable.

The analysis of the data revealed that five strategies were used for translating puns, and these strategies were designed to transfer the source text's effect. Therefore, it can be concluded

that translatability is a relative concept rather than an absolute one.

The discussion of the findings and the comparison with previous studies revealed some points of contradiction. For example, the parallel findings in Mohammadsalari (2014)¹⁹ and the contradicting findings reported in Eslami Rasekh and Ordudary (2002)¹⁸ could be attributed to the nature of the texts analyzed. Mohammadsalari (2014)¹⁹ examined Delabastita's strategies on a prose text (*Alice in Wonderland*), while Eslami Rasekh and Ordudary (2002)¹⁹ investigated the application of Delabastita's model on poetry. Therefore, the similarity and difference in the style of the texts analyzed may have been the source of the contradicting and parallel results.

Through interviews with some translators regarding the challenges of translating humor in subtitled and dubbed films, some results were obtained. They believed that what sets AVT (Audiovisual Translation) apart from other types of translation is the constraints imposed by the visual context of the film on subtitles, making the translation of humor in these films very challenging. The need to reduce the original message to fit within the limited space of subtitles is a significant challenge.

Other translators believed that formal challenges are more important in translating humor in subtitled and dubbed films. They identified two major formal challenges: the space factor, where only a maximum of two lines with around 35 characters each are allowed, and the time factor. Time is particularly critical as translators need to consider how much time the audience will have to read and comprehend the subtitle. Traditionally, a time frame of 5-6 seconds has been considered sufficient for reading a two-liner.

According to other translators, translating cultural references is also a challenging aspect of AVT. One of the main issues they face is decoding the meaning of the ST subtitles, as it can be challenging to understand the intended meaning of cultural references. Ambiguity and lack of coherence in some verbal texts, such as speeches, can also pose a challenge as translators must decide whether to prioritize faithfulness to the ST or communicative clarity in the

translation. Additionally, emotive words require careful consideration to ensure that their impact is retained in the translation.

Cultural customs and traditions also play a significant role in the translation of AVT. Translators must be familiar with the cultural background of the source language and the target language to effectively convey the intended meaning of cultural references. Failure to consider these customs and traditions can result in misunderstandings or the loss of the intended impact of the cultural reference in the translation.

Limitations of the Study

In line with the aim of the study to investigate the translation of humor in audiovisual material, only films that have multiple translations, both subtitled and dubbed, were analyzed. However, due to the limited availability of subtitled and dubbed films on Filimo, only a limited number of films were included in the study. Another limitation was the presence of censorship, e.g. verbal or visual censorship, which complicated the analysis process. Furthermore, since the evaluation of translation strategies is subjective, the researcher's own interpretations and biases may have influenced the data collection. Finally, determining whether an utterance is humorous is a partially subjective matter that could influence the results of the study. Therefore, further replications with larger and more diverse samples are needed before the results of the study can be generalized.

Implications

Based on the reported results and the scope of this study, and taking into account the limitations and delimitations, several implications for translators and translator trainers can be suggested, as follows:

The analysis of the findings provides valuable insights for novice translators who are interested in translating literary works, particularly in the context of movie translation. The results of this study indicate that the most challenging aspect of humor translation is related to linguistic resources that are the source of humor, which can result in a blurred perception of

humor for the target audience. To translate humorous puns effectively, translators can adopt the strategies used in this study, where puns were not translated literally. Instead, the equivalent effect and the use of synonyms from the target language were used to translate the puns. This approach is recommended as all the translators in the study followed the same patterns of humorous pun translation strategies.

The findings of this study suggest that caution should be exercised when using editorial techniques, such as footnotes, endnotes, translator's comments in the foreword or afterword, and explanations in parentheses. In this analysis, the translators have predominantly refrained from using such methods, suggesting that these techniques may not be the most efficient choice due to time and space constraints.

References

- Ameri, S., & Khoshsaligheh, M. (2022). Insights into Iranian younger audience of Persian amateur subtitling: A reception study. *Onomázein*, 56, 144–166. <https://doi.org/10.7764/onomazein.56.08>
- Bassnett, S. (2007). Culture and translation. In P. Kuhiwczak & K. Littau (Eds.), *A companion to translation studies* (pp. 1–10). Multilingual Matters.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Cintas, J. D., & Remael, A. (2007). *Audiovisual translation: Subtitling*. Routledge.
- Dehjalali, M. R., & Izadpanah, S. (2017). The study of vocabulary awareness effect on intermediate language learners' depth of vocabulary knowledge in genuine Persian texts. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 7(1), 185–191. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v7n1p185>
- Eslami-Rasekh, A., & Ordudary, M. (2002). The study of pun in English translations of Sa'di's *The Bustan*. *Translation Studies*, 7(1), 1–15.
- Freud, S. (1950). *Totem and taboo*. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Ghajarieh, A., Mozaheb, M. A., & Ghaziyani, Z. A. (2024). Playing with words across visual humor in an Iranian EFL context with Arab students: Pedagogical translanguaging for enhancement of multicultural spaces in language education. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 124, 102278. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102278>
- Khodabandeh, F. (2019). Humor translation in Persian dubbing of an American animation "The Boss Baby": Investigating translation strategies in two different reception environments. *Language and Translation Studies*, 52(3), 121–154.
- Khoshsaligheh, M. (2022). Dubbing varieties in the Iranian mediascape: Typology revisited. In *Abstract book of the 4th Conference on Interdisciplinary Approaches to Language Teaching, Literature and Translation Studies*. Ferdowsi University of Mashhad.
- Khoshsaligheh, M., & Ameri, S. (2016). Ideological considerations in official dubbing in Iran. *Altre Modernità*, 15(Special Issue), 232–250. <https://doi.org/10.13130/2035-7680/7246>
- Khoshsaligheh, M., Ameri, S., Khajepoor, B., & Shokoohmand, F. (2019). Amateur subtitling in a dubbing country: The reception of Iranian audience. *Observatorio (OBS)*, 13(3), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.15847/obsobs13320191439>
- Khoshsaligheh, M., Ameri, S., Shokoohmand, F., & Mehdizadkhani, M. (2020). Subtitling in the Iranian mediascape: Towards a culture-specific typology. *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language*, 8(2), 55–74.
- Landheer, R. (1989). L'ambiguïté: un défi traductologique. *Meta: Journal des Traducteurs*, 34(1), 33–43. <https://doi.org/10.7202/003569ar>
- Mateo, M. (1995). *La traducción del humor: Las comedias inglesas en español*. Universidad de Oviedo.

- Mohammdsalari, Z., Behtaj, H., & Moinsadeh, S. N. (2014). A contrastive analysis of translation of puns in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. *International Journal of Language Learning and Teaching Applied Linguistics World*, 7(1), 44–55.
- Nourizadeh, Y. (2003). *Different techniques of translating simile* (Unpublished master's thesis). Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch.
- Pierini, P. (2007). Simile in English: From description to translation. *Círculo de Lingüística Aplicada a la Comunicación*, 29, 21–43. https://doi.org/10.5209/rev_CLAC.2007.v29.8783
- Rezvani Sichani, B., Afrouz, M., & Moinsadeh, A. (2023). The representation of multilingualism in dubbing and subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH). *Multilingua*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2022-0140>
- Rezvani Sichani, B., & Afrouz, M. (2019). A curious case of taboo rendition in Persian AVT: A spectrum of ideas. *Iranian Journal of Translation Studies*, 16(63), 23–38.
- Sadeghpour, H. R., & Omar, H. C. (2015). Humor translation in Persian subtitled comedy movies into English: A case study of 'lizard'. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 5(10), 1995–2002. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0510.04>
- Sadeghpour, H. R. (2021). Examining the transference of humorous expressions based on extralinguistic cultural references (ECRs) in comedy animations from English into Persian dubbed and subtitled versions. *Babel*, 67(3), 307–331. <https://doi.org/10.1075/babel.00234.sad>
- Shamsaeefard, M., Falahati Qadimi Fumani, M. R., & Nemati, A. (2013). Strategies for translation of similes in four different Persian translations of *Hamlet*. *Linguistics and Literature Studies*, 1(3), 164–168. <https://doi.org/10.13189/lls.2013.010306>
- Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of mixed methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioral sciences*. Sage.
- Toury, G. (2004). The nature and role of norms in translation. In L. Venuti (Ed.), *The translation studies reader* (2nd ed., pp. 205–217). Routledge.
- Uras Yılmaz, A., & Çakıroğlu, K. (2021). Subtitling humor in the series “The Big Bang Theory.” *İstanbul Üniversitesi Çeviri-bilim Dergisi / I.U. Journal of Translation Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.26650/iujts.2020.13.0002>
- Zolczer, P. (2016). Translating humour in audiovisual media. *European Journal of Humour Research*, 4(1), 76–92. <https://doi.org/10.7592/ejhr2016.4.1.zolczer>