Strategies Available for Translating Persian Epic Poetry:
A Case of *Shahnameh*

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Abstract

This study tried to find the strategies applied in three English translations of the Battle of Rostam and Esfandiyar. To this aim, the source text (ST) was analyzed verse by verse with each verse being compared with its English translations to determine what procedures the translators had used to render the source text. Subsequently, the frequency of usage for each procedure was measured to answer the research questions. Michele Jones's fourfold classification of poetry translation strategies and Reiss and Vermeer's skopos theory were used as the frameworks of this study; Jones introduces literal, approximation, adaptation, and imitation strategies, ranging from literal which is very faithful to the original form, to imitation that is very free and has little in common with the original. The analyses showed that, regardless of imitation not used in this corpus, the translators of this study had mostly rendered the ST using approximation, with adaptation being the least frequently used method. Translators' paratextual materials, including their fore- and afterwords, were used as the sources for identifying the reason for the application of each strategy. Moreover, we have concluded that, according to skopos theory, translators use different strategies according to the different functions target texts (TT) will have in the target context.

Keywords: Approximation, Michele H. Jones, Shahnameh, Skopos theory, Translation strategies

INTRODUCTION

Poetry's being the most translation-resistant literary genre has led to innumerable ongoing, heated debates over *how* it should/can be translated. The answer to this frequently raised question of how may be sought in two groups of theories: (1) The *prescriptive* theories whose advocates, including Newmark, lay down or dictate different methods, strategies, or procedures available for rendering a text from a source language (SL) into a target language (TL). These theories prescribe the allegedly *appropriate* translation methods; (2) the *descriptive* theories, which, after the introduction of Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) by Toury (1995), tend to answer translation-related questions through a bottom-up approach, moving from the comparison of actual ST and TT pairs to formulation of general theories; rather than prescribing how a piece of poetry *should* be translated, DTS has tried to look at the way different translators of a work *are* rendering it into another language, exploring, in fact, the dominant norm in any literary system. As a product-oriented study, the present research adopted a

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descriptive approach to the question of poetry translation strategies.

One of the representatives of the prescriptive group is the Russian-born American novelist and literary critic, Nabokov, who believed that metered and rhymed poetry cannot be translated in meter and rhyme, but in prose. He suggests that literalism meaning absolute accuracy prescribes the use of a translation replete with "copious footnotes, footnotes reaching up like skyscrapers to the top of this or that page" (2000, p. 83). Some other theorists, including Robert Frost, do not consider poetry to be translatable. Lefevere is one of the representatives of the descriptive group; analyzing a number of English translations of Catullus's poem LXIV, Lefevere (1975) determines and introduces seven strategies for poetry translation: "phonemic translation, literal translation, metrical translation, poetry into prose, rhymed translation, blank verse translation, and interpretation" among which he notes blank verse translation as less deficient than other methods (pp. 4-5). Bly (1982), instead, assumes that poetry is translatable and puts forward eight stages for translating a poem into American English.

It has frequently been asserted that translation of poetry, as a form-focused, expressive or sensitive kind of text, is more demanding than other text types. One of the reasons for this difficulty is the inseparability of content and form in this literary genre. In other words, a considerable part of the sense and spirit of each poem is interwoven into its form, and content is not all the property a poem has, as color is not all the building block in a painting; what turns poetry into poetry, and a painting into painting, is *the way* their materials are put together to form an artistic whole. Most research works on poetry translation have chosen to address the problems or challenges faced by and the strategies or methods available for poetry translators while translating, proper nouns, similes, metaphors, euphemisms, puns, etc. In case of *Shahnameh*, as the historical and mythical document and the typical epic verse of the Persians, apart from the abovementioned are-

as of research, as often as not its historical, mythological, cultural, political and linguistic aspects have also been scrutinized, there being little, if any, attention paid to how it is to be rendered from the very first steps in its translation. Bahraman and Erfaniyan Qonsuli (2017) for example applied Newmark's model for metaphor translation to the *Story of Zal and Simorq*. In another study, Mohammadi and Keshavarzi (2016) investigated the culture-specific items in the *Story of Rostam and Sohrab,* choosing Zimmern's English translation as their corpus. Mashhady and Noura (2012) took Catford's framework about untranslatability and applied it to Warner and Warner's English translation of *Shahnameh*. As the examples show, over and over again, those interested in the study of poetry translation have chosen to devote much time and energy to whatever particularities and details but the methods for translating a whole poem. This might explain the reason why there is not, to date, a definite, clear-cut answer to the how question raised at the beginning of this study.

This study is important in that, through a detailed analysis of the three translations of a single epic poem and identification of various strategies used by the translators, it can, at least, help translators enjoy a bird's eye view of the strategies available for translating a piece of epic poetry and the methods more frequently used, hence smoothing the way for them to embark upon the work of *systematic* translation of epic poetry. Being aware of the methods, poetry translators will translate *systematically*, and choose / reject different methods purposefully. Apart from its many advantages, this kind of analysis will directly bring about an increase both in the *quantity* and *quality* of translations of this poetic genre. The findings of this research could be of use to those who are involved in poetry translation, poetry teaching, as well as to poetry-translation teachers and scholars.

The present study tried to answer the following questions:

1) *Which one of Jones' four strategies is most frequently used by every English translator, and which one is least frequently used?*

2) *Which one of Jones' four strategies is the most and which one is the least frequently used one among all English translations?*

3) *What is the reason behind the most and the least frequently used strategies?*

To answer the first two questions, Michele H. Jones's (1997) fore-fold classification of translation strategies is applied: Jones introduces literal translation, approximation, adaptation and imitation as four possible translation methods. To tackle the third question, Reiss and Vermeer's (2014) skopos theory is applied. According to Shuttleworth and Cowie, skopos theory argues that "the shape of TT should above all be determined by the function or 'skopos' that it is intended to fulfil in the target context" (1997, p. 156; italics added for emphasis).

Poetry translation is difficult, to be sure, and there are different, sometimes opposing views regarding its translatability. However, so highly has it been emphasized throughout history that a group have considered poetry to be totally untranslatable; the most representative example of this group was the American poet, Robert Frost, who defined poetry as "what gets left out in translation" (cited in Robinson, 2010, p. 23). Comparing Frost's view with, perhaps the most skeptical member of this group, Quine's idea of radical translation which, to quote Venuti's interpretation, "questions the empirical foundations of translating by pointing to a basic semantic 'indeterminacy' that cannot be resolved even in the presence of an environmental 'stimulus'" (2000, p. 67), would encourage us to be highly grateful to Frost for his justice and moderation! Next to Frost is Nabokov, who believes that "metered and rhymed poetry cannot be translated in meter and rhyme, but in prose" (2000, p. 83). He suggests a literal method for poetry translation and

prescribes a translation replete with "copious footnotes, footnotes reaching up like skyscrapers to the top of this or that page" (p. 83). In contrast to the views of the first group, there are those of a second group who not only avoid considering translation of poetry impossible, but take, as Fitzgerald writes, "what liberties they like" (cited in Bassnett, 2014, p. 95). The extreme example of this group is the Russian-American novelist and poet, Brodsky who proclaims that "poetry is what is gained in translation" (cited in Frajlich, 2006, p. iv). However, Holmes, paraphrasing the same issues in rather interesting terms, sums up with three different views, saying:

> At one extreme are those who consider that every text, hence all poetry, can be transferred from one language to another without substantial loss. Let us call them the radical left. At the opposite extreme are those who contend that no text in one language is ever completely equivalent to any text in another language, and consequently that all translation is impossible. Let us call *them* the radical right. In translation as in politics, most people take their stance in between the two extremes, believing that translation, of poetry at any rate, is sometimes possible, sometimes impossible; sometimes easy, sometimes difficult; sometimes a failure, sometimes an amazing success. (1994, p. 45; italics in the original)

Notwithstanding the problems and challenges, a quick look into numerous volumes of great poetry translated from and into different languages, including the Persian-English pair, demonstrates that poetry *is* translatable. Bly (1982), for instance, defines eight stages for translating poetry into American spoken English. Holmes steps further to introduce four methods for translating poetry, as follows:

1) Mimetic: where the original form is retained; 2) Analogical: where a culturally corresponding form is used; 3)

Organic: where the semantic material is allowed to take on its own unique poetic shape as the translation develops; 4) Deviant or extraneous, where the form adopted is no way implicit in either form or content of the original. (1994, p. 25)

Hanson (1992, p. 29) divides poetry translation into five broad categories: 1) Word-for-word; 2) Literal cum literate; 3) Prose; 4) Unrhymed verse; and 5) Rhymed verse. Last but not least is the framework of the present study, the four-fold translation strategies framework presented by Michele H. Jones (1997). She introduces literal translation, approximation, adaptation and imitation, though she does not provide any new definition for them and uses those definitions presented by other theoreticians. In literal translation, according to Manafi Anari (2001, p. 18), as in Nida's formal equivalence, translators attempt to remain faithful to the source message both in form and content. Referring to Jones, Manafi Anari (p. 18) defines approximation as another method of poetry translation where "translator is faithful to some aspects of the original poem, but he takes certain liberties so that a sensible translation may be produced." Here, faithfulness to the syntax of the original is less observed than in literal translation. As regards adaptation, Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997, p. 3) consider adaptation as usually implying that "*considerable changes have been made in order to make the text more suitable* for a specific *audience* (e.g. children) or for the particular *purpose* behind the translation" (Italics added for emphasis). Imitation is defined by Dryden (1680) as a process where a translator "assumes the liberty, not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion" (cited in Baker & Malmkjaer, 1998, p. 111). Therefore, imitation may be put more simply as creating a new poem in the TL with the theme of that in the SL, leaving behind both the ST form and content. This type of poetry translation was mostly practiced by poet-translators of the 17th century. The main difference among all these strategies is in the degree of translator's faithfulness to the ST form.

Owing to its significant status in the world literature, translations of *Shahnameh* have been investigated from many perspectives. As regards the specific area of the *strategies* of translation, Dehbashi (2010) investigated the translation of semantic features and figurative language in Davis' English translation of the *Story of Rostam and Sohrab*, and concluded that in 74% of cases the translator had rendered the corpus correctly, claiming that his translation was communicative, i.e. the translator tried to translate the *content*, to the detriment of changing the form. Rahimzadeh (2008) also investigated Sabri Tabrizi's English translation of Shahryar's *Heydar Babaya Salam* and interestingly applied Jones' framework to the study, concluding that *literal* translation was the most frequent strategy in the corpus. Ghadery (2010), in another research, analyzed five English translations of Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* and, using Jones' framework, concluded that *approximation* was the most frequent strategy in the corpus. However, each ST has its characteristics and might yield different results. The researchers of this study could find no study applying Jones' framework to any story of *Shahnameh*. The present work, thus, for the first time, is going to apply Jones' framework to the *Story of Rostam and Esfandiyar* and determine the strategies the three translators used in their English translations.

METHODS
Corpus of the Study
As different types of poetry vary in many respects, they need to be translated differently. Accordingly, this study has chosen the epic poetry as its subject and intends to determine the way an epic poem can be translated from Persian into English. To this aim, *Shahnameh* was selected as the corpus of the study owing to its eminent epic characteristics. Alluding to the resistance in Europe against recognizing *Shahnameh* as a world classic due to some Eurocentric assumptions, Lewis (2015) draws on the ideas of Sir William Jones, Mathew Arnold, and Sainte-Beuve, among

others, to entitle the *Book of Kings* as a world literature text. Again, owing to the immense length of *Shahnameh* – it is about 120 thousand lines – the *Battle of Rostam and Esfandiyar* (henceforth simply the *Battle*) was selected as the corpus. Scholars believe this story best represents Ferdowsi's epic eloquence; moreover, it is in this story that Esfandiyar, as the Iranian prince, and Rostam, as Iran's mythological hero, go the way of all flesh.

Aristotle defines tragedy as an "imitation of an action that is *complete*, and *whole*, and of a certain *magnitude*; […] a *whole* is that which has a *beginning*, a *middle*, and an *end*" (trans. 1907; italics added for emphasis). In other words, if a narrative piece of tragic poetry intends to influence and appeal to the audience, it should be coherent and be read without stopping and in a single session. Therefore, to make the corpus fit into this study, 20 couplets (40 lines) were selected from the 1676 couplets of the *Battle*. Apart from the coherence of the sample no other factor was considered and the sample was selected quite randomly.

The English translations by Arthur George Warner and Edmond Warner (1910) (henceforth Warners); Jerome W. Clinton (1999); and Dick Davis (2007) were also selected as the English corpus. As this study is trying to identify the most frequent strategies among all English translations of the *Battle,* effort was made to select the most recent and unabridged renderings. Effort was also made to select those translations which were in verse, or were a mixture of verse and prose, a technique Davis (2007) applied in his translation and called it prosimetrum. Translations completely in prose were excluded from this corpus for they have paraphrased the whole work and are far less akin to the Persian manuscript both in form and grandeur.

Procedure

In what follows, the ST and its three TTs are presented in succession. Then, in the analysis phase, each Persian verse is juxtaposed with its three English renderings to determine what translation strategy each translator has applied for translating each pair of lines. Afterwards, procedures used by each translator are analyzed to determine his most/least frequent strategies. Then, the frequency of each strategy is calculated for all translations to determine what strategy has been the most/least frequent one among all translations. In the end, the reason behind the usage of strategies is discussed.

The Source Text

Below, the 20 couplets of the *Battle* are provided. The Moscow Edition of *Shahnameh* was selected as the source for the selection of the ST.

Verse 1	بدانست رستم که لابه به کار نیاید همی پیش اسفندیار
Verse 2	کمان را به زه کرد و آن تیر گز که پیکانش را داده بد آب رز
Verse 3	همی راند تیر گز اندر کمان سر خویش کرده سوی آسمان
Verse 4	همی گفت کای پاک دادار هور فزاینده دانش و فر و زور
Verse 5	همی بینی این پاک جان مرا توان مرا هم روان مرا
Verse 6	که چندین بپیچم که اسفندیار مگر سر بپیچاند از کارزار
Verse 7	تو دانی که بیداد کوشد همی همی جنگ و مردی فروشد همی
Verse 8	به بادافره این گناهم مگیر تویی آفریننده ماه و تیر
Verse 9	چو خودکامه جنگی بدید آن درنگ که رستم همی دیر شد سوی جنگ
Verse 10	بدو گفت کای سگزی بدگمان نشد سیر جانت ز تیر و کمان
Verse 11	ببینی کنون تیر گشتاسپی دل شیر و پیکان لهراسپی
Verse 12	یکی تیر بر ترگ رستم بزد چنان کز کمان سواران سزد
Verse 13	تهمتن گز اندر کمان راند زود بران سان که سیمرغ فرموده بود
Verse 14	بزد تیر بر چشم اسفندیار سیه شد جهان پیش آن نامدار
Verse 15	خم آورد بالای سرو سهی ازو دور شد دانش و فرهی
Verse 16	نگون شد سر شاه یزدان‌پرست بیفتاد چاچی کمانش ز دست
Verse 17	ز تاج پدر بر سرم بد رسید در گنج را جان من شد کلید
Verse 18	فرستادم اینک به نزدیک او که شرم آورد جان تاریک او

Verse 19   بگفت این و برزد یکی تیز دم
                    که بر من ز گشتاسپ آمد ستم

Verse 20   همانگه برفت از تنش جان پاک
                    تن خسته افگنده بر تیره خاک

The First Translation: Arthur George Warner and Edmond Warner

When Rustam knew that humbleness availed not
Before Asfandiyar, he strung his bow,
And set therein the shaft of tamarisk,
With baneful points, and set therein the shaft
Of tamarisk, and said: "O Lord of sun
And moon, who makest knowledge, Grace, and strength
Thou seest my mind pure in intent,
My soul, and self-control, for much I toil,
To turn Asfandiyar from strife. Thou knowest
That his contention is unjust, and how
His traffic with me is all fight and prowess;
So visit not my crime with retribution,
O Maker of the moon and Mercury!"
Asfandiyar perceived him tarrying long,
From strife, and said to him: "O famous Rustam!
Thy soul is satiate of fight, but now
Thou shalt behold the arrows of Gushtasp,
Luhrasp's own arrow-heads and lion-heart."
Then Rustam quickly fitted to his bow
The tamarisk-shaft as the Simurgh had bidden;
He struck Asfandiyar full in the eyes,
And all the world grew dark before that chief;
The straight-stemmed Cyprus bent, intelligence
And Grace abandoned him. The pious prince
Fell prone, his bow of Chach dropped from his hands,
"Ill hath befall'n me through my father's crown;
To him my death hath been the key of treasures.
Behold I have sent Bishutan to him
To shame his gloomy soul."
He spake, then gasped: ---
"This wrong hath come upon me from Gush-tasp."
With that his pure soul parted from his body,
Which lay shaft-stricken on the darksome dust.

The Second Translation: Jerome W. Clinton

Rostam knew that now it would be fruitless

To reason further with Esfandiyar.
He strung his bow and grasped the arrow made
Of tamarisk, whose point he'd cured in wine.
He placed it on the bow, then turned his face
Toward the sky. "O God, Creator of
The sun! Pure Lord of wisdom, strength
And majesty. You see my unstained soul,
My strength and my integrity, and how
I've bent and twisted so Esfandiyar
Would turn aside from war at last.
You know his actions are unjust. You see
Him taunt me with his virtue and his strength,
And challenge me to fight. O creator of
The moon and mercury, don't punish me
For my grave sin!" Because Rostam
Was slow to fight, the headstrong warrior
Called out to him, "Come, my deceitful foe,
I see that your Sistanian soul has lost
Its taste for war! But now, you must confront
The arrowheads of Shah Lohrasp, the shafts
Of Shah Goshtasp and my own lion heart.
Then, with all the force of his great bow,
He shot an arrow that struck the helmet of
Rostam. As Simorgh had instructed him,
Tahamtan quickly placed the arrow made
Of tamarisk upon his bow and struck
Esfandiyar's eye with it. The world grew black
Before him. His body, tall and straight,
As any cypress tree, bent to the earth.
Wisdom and glory fled. The head
Of that great shah, who'd served Yazdan so well,
Drooped to his chest.
His hardwood bow slipped from his grasp. My
father's crown has heaped
Misfortune on my head. He thought my soul
The key to what he valued most. I send
It to him now to make his own feel shame.'"
He paused, took one last breath and said, "This wrong
Was done to me by Goshtasp Shah!" Just at
That instant, his pure soul left his wounded body,
And he collapsed upon the dusky earth.

The Third Translation: Dick Davis

When Rostam saw that his offers of friendship
had no effect on Esfandiyar,

He notched the wine-soaked tamarisk arrow to his bow

And lifted his eyes to the heavens, saying:

"*Just Lord, who gives us knowledge, strength and life,*

You see my weakness and humility,

You know how I have sought to end this strife;

You see his unjust demands:

Creator of the moon and the Mercury,

... I pray that you

See nothing sinful in what I must do."

Rostam hung back for a moment, and Esfandiyar taunted him:

"Well, famous Rostam, it seems your soul's grown tired of combat, now that you're faced with the arrows of Goshtasp, the lion heart and spear points of Lohrasp."

Not translated.

Then, as the Simorgh had ordered him, Rostam drew back his bow.

Aiming at Esfandiyar's eyes he released the arrow, and for the Persian prince the world was turned to darkness.

The tall cypress swayed and bent, knowledge and glory fled from him;

The God-fearing prince bowed his head and slumped forward, and his Chinese bow slipped from his hand.

"Evil came to me from my father's crown; the key to his treasury was my life.

Tell my womenfolk that I have sent you to the court to shame his dark soul."

He paused, and caught his breath, and said: "It was Goshtasp, my father, who destroyed me," and at that moment his pure soul left his wounded body, which lay dead in the dust.

RESULTS

Verse by verse analysis of the ST and comparison of each couplet with its three English translations was performed to determine the strategies adopted by each translator. The results of this stage are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Strategies Adopted by the Three Translators

Verse No.	Warners	Clinton	Davis
1	Literal	Approximation	Adaptation
2	Approximation	Literal	Adaptation
3	Approximation	Literal	Approximation
4	Approximation	Approximation	Approximation
5	Literal	Literal	Adaptation
6	Approximation	Literal	Adaptation
7	Literal	Approximation	Approximation
8	Literal	Approximation	Approximation
9	Approximation	Approximation	Adaptation
10	Literal	Approximation	Approximation
11	Literal	Approximation	Approximation
12	Adaptation	Approximation	Adaptation
13	Approximation	Literal	Approximation
14	Literal	Literal	Adaptation
15	Literal	Approximation	Approximation
16	Literal	Approximation	Approximation
17	Literal	Approximation	Literal
18	Approximation	Approximation	Approximation
19	Literal	Approximation	Adaptation
20	Literal	Literal	Approximation

Afterward, according to data provided in Table 1, the frequency and percentage of each strategy were calculated. The data obtained in this phase are briefly shown in Table 2. Then, the frequency and percentage of the occurrence of each strategy in all the translations (60 couplets) were calculated; the results of this phase are also shown in Table 3.

Table 2.

Frequency and Percentage of Using Each Strategy by Every Translator

Translators	Number and Percentage of Occurrence of Each Strategy			
	Literal	Approximation	Adaptation	Imitation
Warner's	12 (60%)	7 (35%)	1 (5%)	0
Clinton	7 (35%)	13 (65%)	0	0
Davis	1 (5%)	11 (55%)	8 (40%)	0

Table 3.

Frequency and Percentage of Using Each Strategy among all Translations

	Number of Occurrence			
	Literal	Approximation	Adaptation	Imitation
All translations	20 (33%)	31 (52%)	9 (15%)	0

Table 4.

The Most Frequently Used Strategy by Every Translator

Translators	Strategies			
	Literal	Approximation	Adaptation	Imitation
Warner's	*			--
Clinton		*		--
Davis		*		--

DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

As Table 2 (above) shows, of the 20 verses translated by Warners, 60% was translated *literally*; 35% of verses in their version was translated using *approximation*, with only one verse being rendered using *adaptation*. Warners have not used *imitation* at all. They have just omitted one verse to avoid repetition, as they say. In this study, according to the selected framework, the cases where the translators have intentionally chosen to omit lines and verses have been categorized as *adaptation*.

Warners have tried to keep as close as possible to ST syntax. In their translation, in most verses even the word order has remained unchanged; they have mostly preserved verb tenses, prepositions, conjunctions, proper nouns, etc., and in a number of verses, they have avoided explicitating or clarifying the cultural elements which the English readers might not know. All these cases prove Warners' 60% use of *literal* translation.

Concerning the musicality of their version, as it is evident and they also mention in their introduction, Warners have rendered the *Battle* in English blank verse. In this prosodic style, the lines are unrhymed, hence so prose-like and fluent; each line has nearly 10 syllables: 5 unstressed syllables followed by 5 stressed ones. These musical limitations have urged Warners to devote 35% of their translation to *approximation*: they have changed the word order, and added, omitted and merged many words to fit each line into iambic pentameter. Regardless of the *imitation* which they have never used and *adaptation* which they have used just once, we can observe that Warners have mainly used two strategies for translating the *Battle*: in most cases, they have translated literally, and in fewer cases they have

resorted to *approximation*. Therefore, their most and least frequent strategies can be defined as *literal* and *approximation*, respectively.

Clinton has applied *literal* strategy only seven times (35%) while he has used *approximation* nearly twice more frequently, 13 times (65%), with no case of *adaptation* and *imitation* being found in his version. Clinton's more frequent use of *approximation* is indicative of his inclination to modernize the ST for the contemporary reader. Like Warners, Clinton has alternated between *literal* and *approximation*, though he has preferred the opposite route: Clinton has attached a greater weight to *approximation* than to *literal*, implying that he has taken a degree of liberty to make the ST more readable and comprehensible. In other words, Clinton has made his best to provide a TT that is, to some extent, both faithful and fluent through a balanced use of *approximation* and *literal* translation.

Clinton's version is metered; he has, except in three lines, translated the ST into English blank verse, the same prosodic device used 90 years earlier by Warners. Therefore, the same limitations facing Warners shackled Clinton's feet. Thus, Clinton has also chosen to get distant from the ST form to clothe his version in blank verse. At word level, he has avoided archaic words, replacing them with their modern equivalents to improve upon the limitations, as Clinton believes, existing in Warners' version: "Although this translation [Warners'] can still be consulted to advantage, the Warners' English now seems dated, their work was based on late and corrupt manuscripts and all nine volumes are long out of print" (1999, p. 139). Moreover, when encountering a word carrying a literary or epic weight, Clinton has tried to find a word with appropriate connotations in his version. He has used a plain syntax in his translation.

Davis's version is a completely different story. He has changed the ST's uniform verse into an alternate pattern of plain prose and rhymed and metered verse. Davis has mostly used *approximation* and *adaptation,* 11 times (55%) and eight times (40%), respectively, if we just ignore his

one and only use of literalism. He has, in other words, turned the metered and rhymed *Battle* in most cases into a prose void of meter and rhyme, replete with modern English terminology intelligible and easy-to-read for the non-specialist English readership, and in some other cases into rhymed and metered verse. Then, following the method applied by the classic Persian *naqqals* (epic story tellers), he has mostly narrated the story in prose, though resorting to verse in times of emphasis or sensitive dialogues. Davis has made use of *adaptation* to paraphrase and adapt the original classic epic verse into a plain English prose, readable and intelligible for 21st-century English readers. He has omitted many lines and verses altogether, changed the syntax of the ST, simplified and modernized the ST vocabulary and syntax, and, to sum up, has done whatever we could to make his text easy-to-read for modern English readers. As shown, none of the translators has used *imitation*. However, in rather frequent cases – those of *approximation* – he has tried to keep the ST content and message through few fine alterations in formal features. As observed in this corpus, no translator has used *imitation* to render the *Battle*.

However, to determine the reason behind the selection of strategies, the researchers tried to find every individual translator's rational than to seek for the reason why a strategy is applied by *all* poetry translators, because finding a definite reason shared by all translators is nearly impossible. Perhaps no source can be so much informative of the so-called *reason* as translators' own prefaces, forewords and introductions. Fortunately, all three translations of the *Battle* include more or less complete introductions or prefaces.

Warners have claimed that theirs is the first complete and unabridged translation of *Shahnameh* in English, although claiming that they have been forced to omit some redundancies to keep the version intelligible. Consequently, they have omitted some parts of *Shahnameh* which they had realized as repetitious, untranslatable, or unintelligible to the reader. Moreover, as the results of this study show, they have mostly

practiced literalism in rendering the ST, and have rarely chosen to change or omit anything, except when they have considered them repetitive. In many cases, they have taken each *line* as a complete unit, and have translated each line word by word. Examples of their use of *approximation* are their translation of verses 2 to 4 where they have transposed the Persian phrase که پیکانش را داده بُد آب رَز (meaning "whose point he had laid in wine") to "with baneful points". They have added "moon", omitted "pure", and changed the syntactic structure of فزایندهٔ دانش (meaning the "Extender of knowledge") to "one who makes knowledge to wax".

Warners have rhymed a number of lines with definite characteristics, and rendered the remaining couplets unrhymed. The translated poem is totally metered, i.e. Warners have equipped their version with a meter equivalent, if not corresponding to, that of the original. In this way, they have proved their fidelity to the original author. However, as they assert, they have occasionally changed the meter according to the features of different passages. This means they have sacrificed, whenever necessary, the meter for the sake of the ST meaning. This signals that they have rendered the ST as literal as possible.

Clinton, on the other hand, has applied only two of the four strategies in his translation. He has used the *literal* and *approximation* strategies. As his Translation's Afterword reads, he has tried to adapt the text of *Shahnameh* to the modern English readership, hence simplifying the complex structures and words, making explicit the implicit meanings, and taking more liberties to modernize the classic *Shahnameh*. In other words, he has translated the time factor in his version, taking the ST from a 13th-century Persian text into a modern 20th century English one.

Davis has, all throughout his version, kept two things in his mind: his audience and his purpose. Justifying his numerous omissions and summarizations in the introduction to his translation, Davis clarifies that the modern readers' appetite for moral teachings is considerably smaller than that of a medieval audience. In fact, Davis has fo-

cused his attention mainly on the linguistic differences between the medieval, 10th-century Persian language and the modern 21st-century English language. In doing so, he has highly simplified and prosified the medieval Persian verse lines. In his version, ST lines and couplets have been turned into plain sentences, conforming to the correct English grammar. Davis' purpose in these deep adjustments is to adapt the ST to a modern English readership reluctant to read *Shahnameh* in its classic form. In fact, according to his skopos, Davis has chosen the prosimetrum form, a mixture of prose and meter, to quote his own term, and has inevitably introduced profound changes in the original.

As Tables 2 and 3 show, from the 60 couplets translated by the three translators, no verse is rendered through *imitation*; *approximation* is the most frequent strategy, meaning that the translators overall try to occupy a middle ground between *literalism* and *adaptation*. However, between *literal* and *adaptation* they have realized to choose *literal* strategy, showing the care taken in the translations of this epic work. *Adaptation* is the least frequent strategy among all translations.

CONCLUSION

According to the findings of this study, it is concluded that, in this corpus, *approximation* and *adaptation* were the most and the least frequent strategies for translating the *Battle*. Interestingly, a similar result was obtained in the previous research by Ghadery (2010): he also concluded that English translators of Khayyam mostly translated the corpus using *approximation*. However, Rahimzadeh (2008), investigating lyrical poetry, introduced the *literal* as the most frequent strategy in rendering Shahryar's poetry. This might imply that apart from the type of poem (e.g. epic, lyric, etc.), the translator's decisions about the skopos of the TT are the determining factors in the selection of translation strategies. In case of the *Battle,* all three translators followed a definite skopos. In fact, they translated systematically and regularly toward achieving a special purpose. In

fact, the skopos has acted as a map toward a desired destination.

Warners' more frequent application of *literal* translation however implies that they have generally handled the ST with gloves, though daring, in fewer instances, to introduce minor alterations in the ST form to preserve the ST meaning and stick to TT meter. The authors of this study believe that the reason Warners have translated mostly *literally* is both the ST's important status as a Persian canon and a world literature and that their version was the first full translation of the work. First steps are always the hardest, and first translations are generally produced with more care.

Clinton, the then Professor of Persian Literature at University of Minnesota who, at the time of this translation, had at least 25 years of experience in teaching Persian Literature, had analyzed the most available English translations of *Shahnameh* to retranslate the work and, through an *inter-temporal* translation, remove the weak points of its previous versions. He has tried to strike a balance between the accuracy of the TT and its beauty and charm, and used *approximation* and *literalism* alternately. He has created a version that is readable for a 21st-century audience who likes to read modern standard English with its simple words and is close to the ST form and substance. Clinton's version is musical and to a large extent faithful to Ferdowsi's matter and manner. It might seem a bit like a paradox, but in reality he has been successful in this regard. Clinton has stroke a balance between two irreconcilable elements of fidelity and beauty; he has in fact contradicted the famous image of the *belle infidèle!* He has shown that a translator can break with the tradition of believing in the impossibility of rendering a piece of poetry both beautifully and faithfully; in fact, Clinton's version remains faithful to the ST content, respects its wording, has musicality, is comprehensible and easy for the 21st-century English readership, and is a good example of translations which can both *sell* and *remain faithful to the poet.*

Persians should be perhaps grateful to Davis and translators like him for the afterlife, to quote Benjamin's (2000) term, they give the canons like *Shahnameh*. Davis has tried to make the *Shahnameh* known in the English-speaking world; his skopos has been to eternalize the *Persian Book of Kings*, to which the authors of this work believe he has attained. He has used the method of ancient story-tellers, called *naqqāl*s, applied in narrating *Shahnameh*. The so-called *naqqāl*s used to narrate the poem mostly in simple prose, thereby helping the audience from every social class to understand the narratives; however, whenever they reached sensitive moments of the poem, they recited the exact lines from *Shahnameh* in a more epic tone. The same technique helped *Shahnameh*, especially before the introduction of the printing industry, to remain the main epic work of the Persians for above 1000 years.

The present study tried to answer three questions about the most and least frequent strategies used in translations of the *Battle*, as well as the reasons behind them. The authors hope the answers can shed light on the issues of poetry translation strategies and lead to developments in the field. Due to space and time limitations, this study might have had its drawbacks, able to be improved and polished in further studies. Future works can adopt other theories to determine the strategies applicable in translating Persian epic poetry. Moreover, other outstanding stories of *Shahnameh*, including that of Rostam and Sohrab, can be chosen as the corpus. So rich and multifaceted is *Shahnameh* that there is room for numerous studies on its translational aspects.

As the results show, there is a reason behind the translators' chosen strategies. They have, in fact, chosen to translate according to the purpose of the TT in the target culture. Therefore, the three translators, as the skopos theory asserts, have chosen to translate the ST in a shape that best suits the TT audience. A TL average literary reader will read *Shahnameh* in English enjoying the musicality of the epic work, in case of Warners and Clinton, and the prosimetric form of the poem offered by Davis. This is the final aim of poetry: to appeal to or move the reader, the message of poetry for poetry's sake doctrine.

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