



The Position Occupied by Persian Translations of English Modern Short Stories in Persian Literary Polysystem

Sayyed Mohammad Karimi Behbahani¹ & Farzaneh NaserKhaki^{2*}

¹ Islamic Azad University, Karaj Branch

² Alborz institute for higher education, Qazvin

Received: 15 May, 2011

Accepted: 20 November, 2012

Abstract

Literatures of various cultures interfere with one another so that each of them may become part of another's literary polysystem. Accordingly, the researchers, in this study, attempted to recognize what position Persian literary polysystem allowed English literature in particular Persian translations of English modern short stories to occupy during 1990-2005. This study also intended to find out the reasons for occupying such a position either central or peripheral. It employed Even-Zohar's polysystem theory as the theoretical framework. In order to collect data, the researchers interviewed seven Persian experts; translators, fiction writers, critics, and literary competition judges. To analyze the data, this study utilized Grounded Theory. The researchers used X-Sight software to conduct a more organized analysis, and NodeXL software to illustrate the relationship among different agents of Persian literary polysystem.

Keywords: Polysystem, literary polysystem, central position, peripheral position, Grounded Theory.

Introduction

Sadegh Hedayat states (in Mir-Abedini, 1998, p. 200), "not being in touch with contemporary thoughts and literary styles is a reason for retardation of Persian literature and its incompatibility with the developed countries' literatures. New and classic masterpieces of the world should be translated into Persian". He continues, "as Iran has to utilize other countries' science and skills, it is in need of their literatures, too". He believes familiarity with foreign developed literatures and use of them is the *raison d'être* of the development of every literature. Furthermore, as Allen (2000) states, different texts talk to and correlate with one another and there is an "intertextual relationship" between them. By these intertextual relationships, texts can interact with one another.

Translation as a means of bridging the gap between languages, cultures, and literatures can fill the vacuum existing in a target language. By its means, "cultural goods migrate between systems" (Hermans, 1999). It brings about in a target culture new local elements, new linguistic structures, and new literary genres and styles that have never been there. Through conveying such elements, the target culture may willy-nilly be influenced (Even-Zohar, 1990) in such a way that makes those elements as its own. Nevertheless, whether this influence is of primary importance or secondary depends on some other factors.

Itamar Even-Zohar was the first scholar who investigated translated literature in its cultural context. He introduced the term polysystem into translation studies. As he himself states (1990, p. 11), polysystem is "a multiple system, a system of various systems which intersect with one

*Corresponding Author's Email: f.naserkhaki@gmail.com



another and partly overlap, using concurrently different options, yet functioning as one structured whole, whose members are interdependent". Even-Zohar had a considerable influence on Gideon Toury (Gentzler, 1993). Toury (1980, cited in Gentzler, 1993) started his study named "The History of Literary Translation into Hebrew" at Tel Aviv University. His study included the prose fiction translated into Hebrew from English, German, French, and Yiddish during fifteen years. It resulted in data gathered on the number of the writers whose works were translated, the number of their books, and the number of translators and publishers. The study's goal was to discover the decision-making strategies used by the translators in the process of translating in order to find out a "system of rules" that regulated translation in Hebrew polysystem. After analysis of the shifts, he understood that linguistic changes were rare. The most changes happened because of "word choices and style" which resulted in discovering "textual norms". He also concluded that linguistics and aesthetics had minimal effect on the process of translating. Toury also found out that most translations were not faithful, and justified that it was because of introducing into the target culture a translation which was acceptable in that culture (Gentzler, 1993).

By considering translation from the viewpoint of the target culture, Toury argued that translation equivalence was not a hypothetical idea, but became an empirical matter. The actual relationship between a source text and a target text might or might not reflect the postulated abstract relationship; nevertheless, the translated text existed as a cultural artifact for the replacement of a source text by an acceptable version in the receiving culture (Gentzler, 1993). So, as Toury (1980, cited in Gentzler, 1993) argued, translation was a relative term dependent on the culture.

A research by Nitsa Ben-Ari involved a "re-mapping of the Hebrew publishing Industry" between 1940 and 1970, by "decoding the identity of many of the agents of popular literature, so far ignored [...] or hidden" (Ben-Ari, 2011, p. 220). She gathered her data through "interviews and Internet sources". She desired to divulge the "role of the two distinct production systems of mainstream and popular literature" in their struggle for domination in Israeli society. These two production systems embodied more

than "different tastes". At the end, she concluded, "the issues of the book industry and its conflicting policies [could] not be separated from the formation of the Israeli identity as postulated by Zionist cultural policy" (Ben-Ari, 2011, p. 241).

This study intended to explore the position of English modern short stories translated into Persian within Persian literary polysystem during 1990-2005. Then, the reasons for gaining such a position were investigated.

Method

The method this study used to select the subjects was snowball sampling. Seven literature experts including literary translators, fiction writers, literature history researchers, literary competition judges, and critics were the participants; they were Hassan Mir-Abedini, Mohammad Hosseini, Shiva Moqanlou, Mohammad-Javad Jazini, Siamak Golshiri, Ali Abdollahi, and Hossein Yaqoubi.

Then, the deep interviews were semi-structured to enable the researchers to revise some items according to the participant's feedbacks. This kind of interview does not ask questions which are directly associated to the topic in question. The questions are indirect and the results are inferred from the answers. The researchers asked the first participant; i.e. an expert, to attend the interview session. This expert introduced the next subject and this procedure continued until the seventh expert attended the interview session, and so the researchers could assemble sufficient data. The researchers transcribed the interviews completely and sent them back to the interviewees. They modified or added additional information to them. They did it because in oral interviews, the interviewees might have skipped some points.

The method this study used to analyze the data obtained from in-depth interviews was "Grounded Theory". The researchers utilized Xsight Qualitative Data Analysis software and NodeXL Social Network Analysis software to analyze the data and visualize them when needed. In what follows, the researchers have explained the steps taken successively:

The modified versions of the transcribed interviews provided the data for the first level of analysis; i.e. open coding. This was the "first level of conceptual analysis of the data" (Dörnyei, 2007). The researchers imported the

transcribed interviews into XSight. Then, they broke every interview into chunks. Some of these chunks were as short as phrases; some were as long as sentences or even paragraphs. This process helped them make an abstraction of the interviews. They assigned a category label to each of the chunks. These labels indicated the content of every chunk.

In the next step, axial coding was carried out.

The codes obtained from the second level provided the source for the third level; i.e. selective coding. The researchers selected a core category e.g. “centrality reasons” in accordance with the purpose they intended to meet. The last coding procedure helped the researchers interpret and draw conclusions with reference to the existing literature; i.e. polysystem theory.

Based on the interviews, the researchers introduced a model that showed the process of text production in Persian literary polysystem.

Finally, the researchers entered the data obtained on the interaction among various agents of the literary polysystem into NodeXL software. As this software is used for Social Network Analysis, it provides a general image of Persian literary polysystem as a network by drawing a flow chart of the interactions among its agents.

Discussion

In this section, the dependency of Persian short story writing is demonstrated at the first blush. It justifies the position occupied by Persian translations of English modern short stories. Then, the relationship among different agents of the Persian literary system is explicated and illustrated.

Dependency of Persian short story writing on translations

Literary history of Iran has reflected ups and downs of Persian fiction writing since its emergence through translations. In this section, the researchers deal with a brief description of the factors leading to the dependent position of translated English modern short stories.

Pre-conditions of a dependent literature (weakness, vacuums, youth)

According to Even-Zohar (1990), there are at least three conditions leading to the centrality of the translated literature; weakness, vacuum, and youth of a literary polysystem.

Firstly, Even-Zohar (1990) believes that the main condition for a literature to become de-

pendent is its weakness. Unidirectional relation between Persian and English literatures, as the participants believed, was evidence to Persian short stories’ deficiencies. If it did not have deficiencies, English literary polysystem would also be willing to import Persian short stories into its realm. Based on the results, the literary awards were another proof for Persian short stories’ deficiency; no Persian fiction has been able to win an important literary award in the world until now. Persian is a language with a limited number of speakers in the world, while in comparison, Turkish works, for example with almost the same limitation, have been able to win such literary awards (for instance Orhan Pamuk’s work that caused big winning), so it might have been due to factors such as economy, culture, or policy as participants believed. However, even those Persian short stories which were translated into English did not attract many readers. As participants agreed, the number of readers who read or commented on Persian short stories did not exceed the number of two hands with reference to various literary websites like *Amazon*. Therefore, based on the interviews, Persian short story writing was weak during 1990-2005.

Secondly, Even-Zohar (1990, p. 47) considers that “when there are turning points, crises, or literary vacuums in a literature”, translated literature can occupy the central position in the literary polysystem of the target culture.

In the early 1920s, short story was absent in Persian literary polysystem. Results of the interviews were persuasive evidence of vacuums in Persian literary polysystem. For instance, “Detective Fiction” was one of the absent genres in Persian literary polysystem that was translated into Persian. Another missing genre that was introduced into Persian literary polysystem through translations was “Fantasy”. Some Persian writers tried these genres, but their works were not as successful as the translations, according to the experts. Topics or themes that interfered i.e. imported into Persian short story writing were urban life and matrimonial affairs that were mainly transmitted through the works of Raymond Carver. These themes were missing in Persian literary polysystem before being introduced by translations. Therefore, lack or shortage of some genres, styles, or themes made Persian short stories dependent on translations.

Thirdly, making an independent literary repertoire is a process that might last for centuries

(Even-Zohar, 1990). When a literature is old, "it may have acquired a rich repertoire". Persian short story repertoire was not old enough; the first person who wrote Persian short stories was Jamalzadeh, known as the father of Persian short story writing (Mir-Abedini, 1998). The father of Persian short story writing was alive some years ago! This was the evidence of the youth of this genre in Persian literary polysystem, based on the interviews. Therefore, Persian literary polysystem was young during 1990-2005.

To sum up, the circumstances Even-Zohar referred to were evident in Persian literary polysystem, so translated English modern short stories were central during the period in question. A number of factors that were influential in acquiring this central position are shown in Figure 1.

Socio-cultural and economic factors

According to Even-Zohar (1990), a literary polysystem consists of six parts. Each of these parts plays an important role in the process of dependency/independency of a literary polysystem. He comments:

it is the *interdependencies* between these factors that allow them to function in the first place. Thus, a CONSUMER may "consume" a PRODUCT produced by a PRODUCER, but in order for the "product" (such as "text") to be generated, a common REPERTOIRE must exist, whose usability is determined by some INSTITUTION. A MARKET must exist where such a good can be transmitted. None of the factors enumerated can be described to function in isolation, and the kind of relations that may be detected run across all possible axes of the scheme (p. 35).

The researchers tried to elaborate on the interrelation between these parts in Persian literary polysystem. They refer to these parts as agents.

Repertoire

As discussed earlier, Persian short stories did not have a rich home repertoire, so the producers had to use the repertoire that translated short stories provided for them to produce their works. Using one repertoire rather than another had various reasons. It might have been due to the internal necessities of the society based on the results.

According to experts because of the popularity of living in cities people tended toward reading about modern life in cities, as it was now familiar and more interesting to them. In addition, matrimonial and family lives were two common subjects all over the world (see Bauer, n.d.; Cengag, 2000; Champion, 2012; Jones, n.d.; King, 2010). Therefore, the short stories on these popular topics became popular in Persian literary polysystem, too. Persian repertoire did not provide good examples of such stories, so the consumers, including readers and other Persian fiction writers started to make use of translated short stories and the models those translations provided. Raymond Carver was an example of the short story writers who wrote English modern short stories on those popular topics. According to the results of the interviews, Carver's translated short stories were the most influential ones in Persian literary polysystem during 1990-2005. Hence, such necessities made such translated short stories influential to constitute Persian home repertoire in the period in question.

Producers

Producers, including writers, publishers, and translators were important agents of Persian literary polysystem. Lefevere (1992, cited in Hermans, 1999) believes that producers are in charge of protecting the "poetics" in a literary system. According to the results of the present study, most Persian short story writers, especially novice or young writers, keep an eye on the literary flows and changes that translations transmit. Based on the models that translations introduced into Persian repertoire, writers produced works that had a lot in common with the translated works.

Publishers as producers, preferred to publish translated works rather than Persian short stories because they could make more money due to the translations' better market. Because the forte of translations was that they already had an author and a translator, so they were more likely to have a better market; if the consumer did not know the translator, s/he might have known the author, or vice versa, or even both of them. However, publishers themselves could be a brand for capturing a better market. Most English writers whose works had been translated into Persian were famous in Persian literary market because the translators and/or publishers preferred to translate and/or publish famous works or famous authors' works.

Institutions

Another factor that resulted in a weak home repertoire was institution. According to Lefevre (1992, cited in Hermans, 1999), institution is an external control mechanism of the literary system. In Even-Zohar's words, "the institution includes at least part of the producers, critics [...], publishing houses, periodicals, clubs, groups of writers, government bodies (like ministerial offices and academies), educational institutions [...], the mass media in all its facets, and more" (1990, p. 37). According to Lefevre, all these institutions are what he calls patronages. Another institution that takes part in Iran is the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance that, as a government body, is responsible for controlling and monitoring the content of the texts before they are published, and omitting or adding the parts it assumes in contradiction to or in favor of the government's interests. It is in accordance with what Lefevre believes as; the patron can "further" or "hinder" reading and writing.

Based on the results of the study, Persian publishing houses had more tendencies toward publishing translated short stories than Persian ones. Its first reason was another institution; i.e. the mentioned Ministry. This institution used to be stricter about Persian short stories than translations. The process of getting publishing licenses for translations was easier, so publishers preferred to circulate translations so that not to waste their time and money waiting for the licenses. The reason for this strictness was the ideology that short stories conveyed to the readers. According to Lefevre, institutions, as a part of the patronage, are "usually more concerned with the ideology of literature than its poetics" (1992, cited in Baker and Saldanha, 2011). During 1990-2005, a theme that this institution assumed safe was "family life". Social problems of West were not a threat for the government from the standpoint of the Ministry of, so short stories with such themes could be published more easily. A point worth mentioning about the governmental body was its reluctance to support non-governmental fiction works; the results showed, it only supported and advertised particular genres such as "war" genre or "religious texts" as we saw in a book named *Da'*. Other works were also published, but they were only under the aegis of the private bodies

after being released.

Secondly, the results of the present study showed that the readers were more willing to read translated short stories than original Persian ones, so translations had a better market than Persian short stories. In order to know the reasons, a cultural and psychological study should be conducted.

Other responsible institutions in Persian literary polysystem were periodicals, TV, Internet, and radio. During two previous decades, emergence of the Internet resulted in an easier access to the world's literary sources. Consequently, the rate of translating sped up and the number of translated works increased. It had positive influences as well as negative ones.

The positive influence of increasing the speed of translating was that translators could translate newly published works of art into Persian. Great number of translated works resulted in many works in different genres and styles from various short story writers.

The negative influence was that these translations were not consistent, in the sense that translators were not following a certain plan for selecting texts or authors for translation. It was due to the lack of an unbiased institution in charge of organizing and supervising the production of translations. The result was a collection of heterogeneous works that were incapable of introducing a certain genre, or a certain author and his/her style based on what the experts believed. This process and other factors mentioned resulted in the emergence of translation as an occupation.

Becoming an occupation made translating more important than story writing in Persian literary polysystem.

According to the data gathered, Mass media were under the aegis of the government in Iran, so they were supposed to advertise particular kinds of literature that were in the government's area of interest. Therefore, private publishers had to find other ways to create a good market for their books. Accordingly, they tried to make use of English authors' popularity. Then, they turned their attention to translation. This was another reason for dependency on translations. Shortage of periodicals peculiar to short stories and short story writing, as an institution to introduce, criticize, and advertise Persian short stories was another reason that marginalized them.

To sum up, institution is the governing body

that sanctions some norms and rejects the others (Even-Zohar, 1990).

Market, Product, and Consumer

Translated short stories were filtered threefold. First, they had undertaken the publishing processes in their source culture. Then, there was the translator or publisher's filter to choose them. Finally, they had to take all the steps applicable to Persian works. Normally, such translated works were more likely to have higher quality- as far as both form and content are concerned- than Persian ones (see Figure 2). Therefore, they attracted more readers; i.e. consumers.

The quality of translated works plus other factors that created more interest in the consumers to read translated works resulted in the translated works' better market than that of Persian short stories. The better rate of sale of translations made booksellers fill their bookshops' windows with translations. On the other hand, consumers trusted booksellers as experts and considered translations as the most important books to read. Therefore, tendencies towards reading translations were more than original Persian books from the side of consumers. This process formed a cycle that resulted in the centrality of translated short stories in Persian literary polysystem.

According to the socio-cultural and economical factors mentioned above, and Even-Zohar's three circumstances—most of which, more or less, existed in Persian literary polysystem—translated English modern short stories occupied the central position in Persian literary polysystem. What the researchers explained so far not only clarified this central position but also explicated the reasons for this centrality.

The network of relationships and interactions between and within various agents of Persian literary polysystem shown in Figure 3 was extracted from NodeXL software.

Analysis of Figure 3 showed that Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance with the out-degree of "1"; i.e. it only referred to its own rules, was the least interactive agent in Persian literary polysystem, one can say, it was not interactive at all. It meant that it did not pay attention to other agents in the literary polysystem in its decision making process. On the other hand, the consumer with the out-degree of "5" was the

most interactive one. It means that every agent in Persian literary polysystem, except Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance with which the consumer does not interact, can affect consumer's decisions. The market refers to the consumer and the publisher, who publish more translations by referring to the Ministry of Culture and the market, and orders more translations to the translators. This is the cycle mentioned previously. The foreign systems affect the consumers, translators, and publishers' decisions by positive criticisms they offer and the literary awards they present to some literary works.

Conclusion

Translated literature, according to Even Zohar (1990), occupies a peripheral position except in three conditions: weakness, youth, or literary vacuums in a literary polysystem. As all these circumstances, not even one or two of them, existed in Persian literary polysystem, the researchers concluded that English modern short stories translated into Persian had occupied a central position in Persian literary polysystem during 1990-2005.

There were literary, socio-cultural and economical factors that caused this central position of translated English modern short stories. Among those reasons, the followings were the most important ones:

- Lack or shortage of some styles or genres was a factor that led to the dependency of Persian literary polysystem on translation in order to fill the vacuums.
- Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance's less strictness about translated short stories was the second factor that led to this central position.
- The translated short stories' better market, which resulted in the publishers' tendency toward them, was the third reason.
- Deficiency of Persian short stories was one of the factors that reinforced Persian short story writing's dependency on translations.
- Iranians' interest in Western works of art, with its own reasons, was the fifth factor.
- Youth of Persian short story writing was another factor that led to this position.

Father of short story writing passed away just a few years ago.

Some other results that emerged during the research process were as follows:

- Raymond Carver was the most influential and central English modern short story writer in Persian literary polysystem during 1990-2005. This short story writer introduced new themes and styles to Persian short stories.
- In Persian literary polysystem, fiction works were chosen for translation mainly because of their market (consumers) in the source culture, the positive criticisms and awards they had been received in the source culture, and internal necessities of the target culture.
- The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance was the least interactive feature in Persian literary polysystem. It means that it did not pay attention to other features of the literary polysystem in order to decide on the acceptance of a work. Its only reference was its own rules.
- The consumer was the most interactive feature while deciding on the content s/he wanted to consume. As his/her name represented, s/he mostly consumed. It means that every part of the Persian literary polysystem, except Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance with which the consumer had no direct interaction, could affect his/her decisions.
- The out-degree and in-degree of the publisher were “4” and “3” respectively. They showed that it played the role of a mediator in Persian literary polysystem; Persian polysystem could not work properly in the absence of the publisher.

As a concluding remark, we can argue that by filling the literary vacuums, reducing the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance’s strictness on Persian fiction writing, and changing the publishing houses’ biased decisions, the central position of translated English modern short stories will be marginalized.

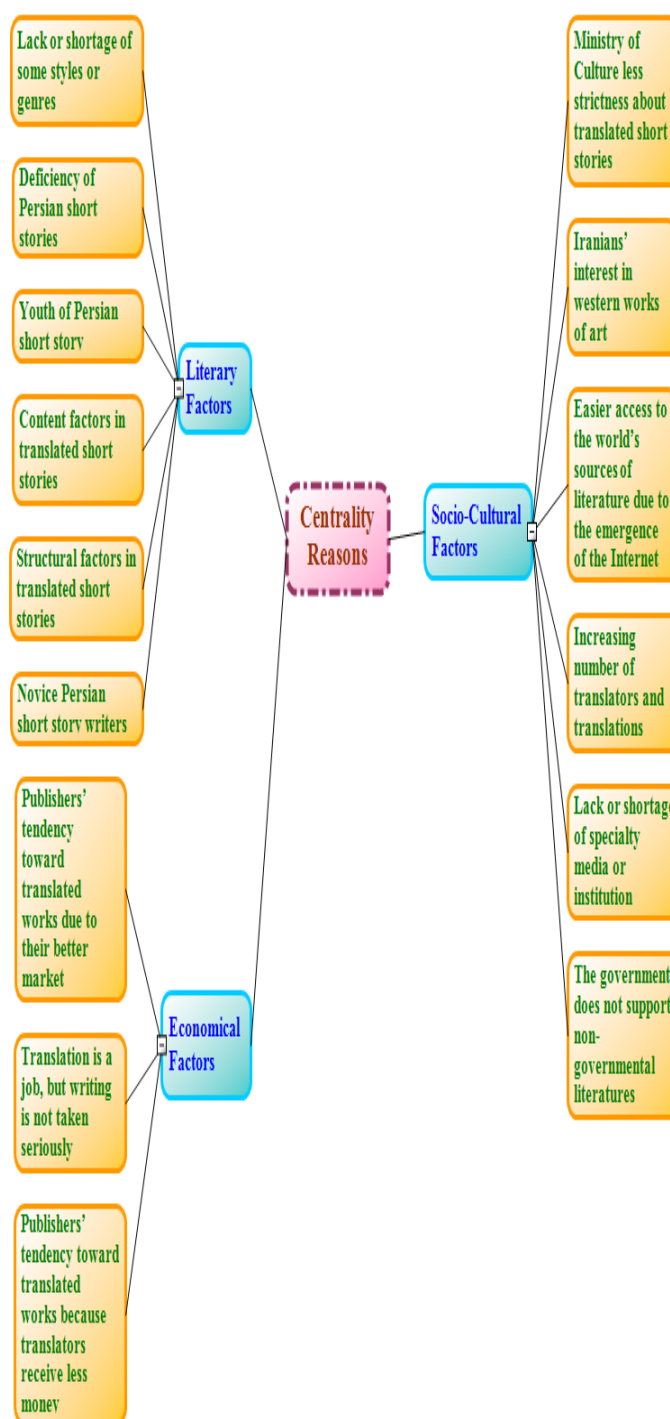


Figure 1. Factors influential in centralizing translated short stories in Persian literary polysystem. The most important factors are in the highest level of each category. This graph is extracted from X-Sight software.

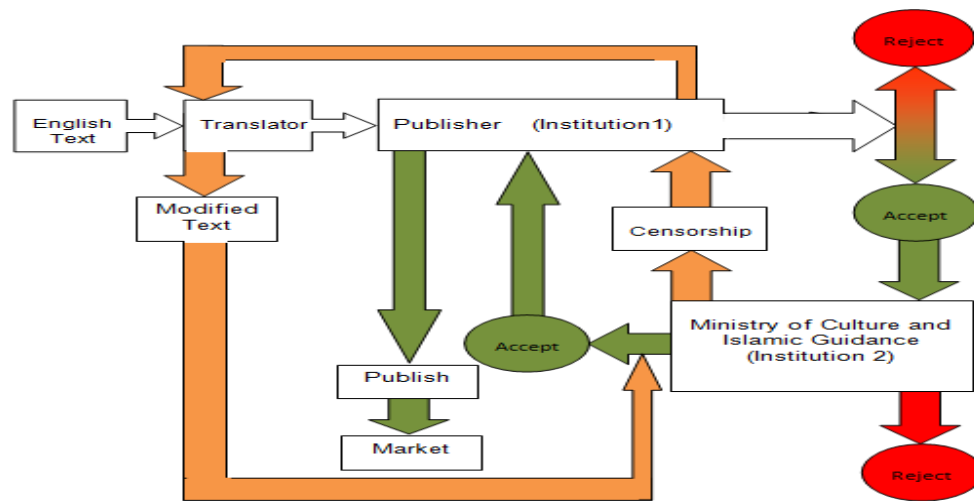


Figure 2. Translation production in Persian literary polysystem. Firstly, the translator translates a book. Then, s/he presents it to the publisher. The publisher may reject or accept to publish it. If the publisher decides to publish the book, s/he presents it to the Ministry. The ministry may reject it or accept it if the publisher revises some parts. Then the publisher gives it back to the translator, translator revises it, and the publisher circulates it. The final product of this process is a translated work that enters the market.

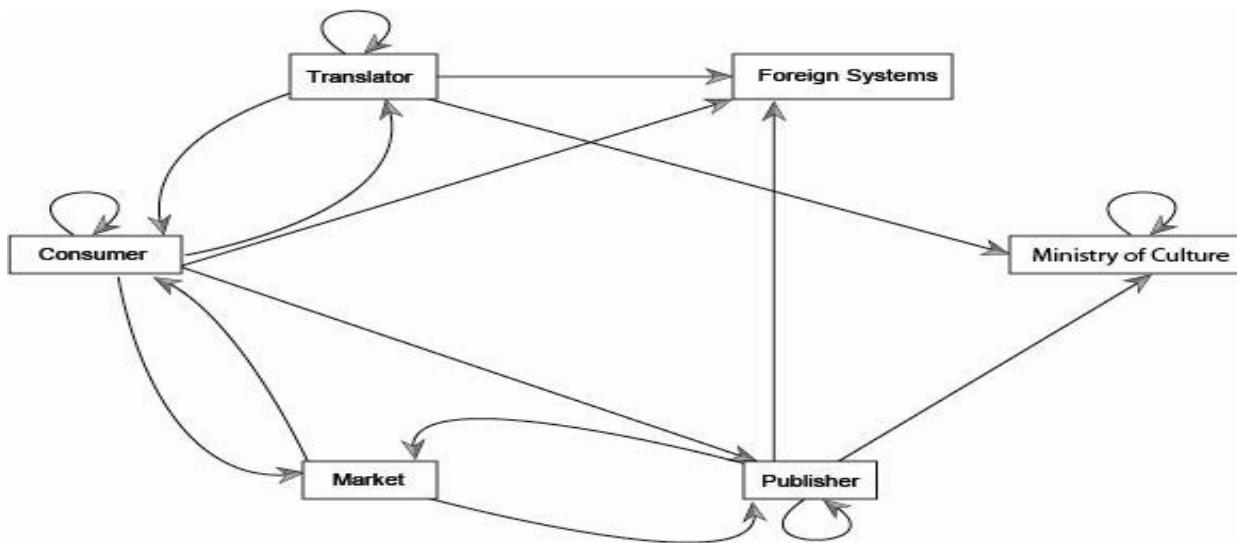


Figure 3. The network of relations and interactions between and within various agents of Persian literary polysystem extracted from NodeXL software. By “Foreign Systems”, the researchers mean every factor in foreign polysystems that Persian polysystem can refer to in its decision making process, like literary awards, positive criticisms, and the like. The self-loops show that these agents refer to themselves to decide which works to read, translate, or publish. The translator considers Ministry of Culture and translates acceptable works, considers consumer and translates bestsellers, and considers foreign systems and selects a text. Consumer buys translations due to translators/publishers’ fame, market’s supply, and awards and criticisms in the foreign systems. Publisher prefers to publish translations due to the rules presented by the Ministry of culture, the market’s demand, and the consumers’ interests. Ministry of Culture refers to its own rules and prefers translations. Market prefers translations due to the publishers’ supply, and the consumers’ interests. Altogether, these decisions and interactions result in the central position of translations.

References

- Allen, G. (2000). *Intertextuality*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Baker, M. and Saldanha, G. (2011). *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (second Ed.). London and New York: Routledge.
- Bauer, J. (n.d.). Raymond Carver. Retrieved February 2012, from www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/raymond-carver
- Ben-Ari, N. (2011). Popular Literature in Hebrew as a Marker of Anti-Sabra Culture. In R. Sela-Sheffy & G. Toury (Eds.), *Culture Contacts and the Making of Cultures: Papers in Homage to Itamar Even-Zohar* (pp. 219-245). Tel Aviv: Unit of Culture Research.
- Cengage, G. (2000). Cathedral Raymond Carver. In *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Retrieved February 2012 from: <http://www.enotes.com/raymond-cathedral-carver-criticism/cathedral-carver-raymond>
- Champion, L. (2012). What's to Say: Silence in Raymond Carver's Feathers. Retrieved February 2012 from: <http://questia.com/pm.qst?a=o&b=5001617178>
- Chang, N. (2008). A Missing Link in Itamar Even-Zohar's Theoretical Thinking. In *Target*, John Benjamins Publishing Company (Vol. 20:1, pp. 135-148).
- Dörnyei, Z. (2011). *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Even Zohar, I. (1990). Polysystem Studies, *Poetics Today*, (Vol. 11: 1).
- Gentzler, E. (1993). *Contemporary Translation Theories*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hermans, T. (1999). *Translation in Systems*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Jones, P. (n.d.). Raymond Carver. Retrieved February 2012 from: <http://college.cengage.com/english/heath/syllabuid/iguide/carver.html>.
- King, A. (2010). Raymond Carver: Critical Perspectives. Retrieved February 2012 from: <http://cwcs.yzu.edu/resources/literature/raymond-carver-critical-perspectives>

Sayyed Mohammad Karimi Behbahani, assistant professor of English Translation, is a full time faculty member of Islamic Azad University, Karaj branch. His area of interest is literary translation and Translation Theory.

Farzaneh Naserkhaki got her M.A. in Translation Studies from Alborz Institute for Higher Education, Qazvin. Her areas of interest and research are literary translation, Discourse Analysis, and Translation Theory.