

Rendering Strategies in Culture-Specific Items: Taboo Expressions in IRIB's Dubbed Hollywood Movies

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Abstract

Translators face a number of difficulties while translating. Not only translation of cultural elements is of utmost importance in translation studies, but also it is an arduous task for translators, especially in the case of interlingual translation. One of the biggest concerns of audiovisual translators is culture-specific items amongst which taboo expressions are included. This study aimed at investigating the applied strategies in the translation of taboo expressions, from English into Persian, in 5 Hollywood dubbed movies by IRIB; namely, *Family Business* (1989), *Lethal Weapon 3* (1992), *Sudden Death* (1995), *Welcome to Collinwood* (2002), and *Anacondas* (2004). Establishing this research, the original movies were compared with their dubbed Persian versions. Hence, the taboo expressions were extracted and compared with their Persian translations in the dubbed versions. Based on Venuti's (1995) strategies in translation studies (i.e., domestication and foreignization), the results were interpreted. Analysis of the relevant data indicated $\chi^2(12, N = 5) = 23.08, p = 0$, considering $**p < 0.05$. Moreover, the "deletion" strategy, with the highest frequency (i.e., 55.97%), was the topmost used strategy in the rendition of the taboo expressions.

Key Words: AVT, Culture-Specific Items, Taboo, Domestication, Foreignization

Introduction

Language, as a highly effective medium of communication, is strongly attached to culture that, as Yule (2009) states, is considered as "socially acquired knowledge" (p. 216). Besides, he believes that culture is a phenomenon like L1 that is acquired with no acute conscious awareness (Yule, 2009). What is more, House (2009) outlined culture as a connected series of conventions and values that are shared through each speech community. Thus, certainly language and culture are strongly associated with each other so far as one can claim that language can be considered as an expression of culture and culture is expressed by language.

Besides, in almost all languages, taboo expressions are thought of as indivisible components of each language. *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2010) introduces taboo as "a subject, word, or activity that individuals avoid as a result of its extraordinarily offensive or embarrassing," and according to Ljung (2011), these words can be placed into five major classes or themes, specifically "religious theme, scatological theme, reproductive organ theme, sexual activities theme, and finally the mother theme" (pp. 184-185).

Moreover, translating cultural items—among which taboo expressions are enclosed—are considered as one of the most problematic issues in audiovisual translation (AVT) for almost all translators. The problem even deteriorates in interlingual translation due to different cultures of the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). As to Newmark (1988), translation is a

“craft consisting in the attempt to replace a written message and/or statement in one language by an equivalent message and/or statement in another language” (p. 190). Though, regarding to the culturally-specific items, it is somehow not possible. Indeed, the meaning of these kinds of elements is strongly linked to the precise cultural context that they originate.

Besides, movie makers have to reflect the authentic and real language of the speech community in their movies in order to make movies more tangible for their audiences. On the contrary, taboo words are an ever-present part in nowadays’ Hollywood movies. Pym (2010) stated that translation can be considered as the “general activity of communication between cultural groups” (p. 143). Therefore, translators not only deal with words, but also they are engaged with the TL culture.

All in all, this research aimed to shed light on the applied strategies in rendering taboo expressions in five dubbed Hollywood movies, namely *Family Business* (1989), *Lethal Weapon 3* (1992), *Sudden Death* (1995), *Welcome to Collinwood* (2002), and *Anacondas* (2004) broadcasted in IRIB. Comparing the original movies with their dubbed version, the overall frequency table of taboos was given. Then, according to the chi-square results, the relevant data were interpreted. Finally, the relevant data were discussed according to the established comparison pattern and were analyzed based on Venuti’s (1995) strategies in translation studies, which are domestication and foreignization.

Literature Review

Taboo language

The term *taboo* was derived from Tongan language *tabu* in the late 18th century that means “forbidden.” Allan and Burridge (2006) expressed that “taboos arise out of social constraints on the individual’s behavior where it can cause discomfort, harm or injury” (p. 1). Moreover, they introduced six different areas for taboos in the Western world, namely:

1. Bodies and their effluvia
2. The organs and acts of sex
3. Diseases, death and killing, physical and mental handicap
4. Religion and church, naming and addressing sacred persons, beings, objects and places
5. Food gathering, preparation and consumption
6. Prostitution, narcotics, and criminal activity

Talking about this issue that how cultural meanings are expressed in a language, Wardhaugh (2006) believes that language is employed to avoid conveying some specific components whereas expressing some others. All in all, the explanation why there is a tendency to think about some words as taboos is that they are associated with certain problems related to certain time and places and should not be veiled, but in their own situation.

Concept of norm in translation

As Toury (2004) stated, the realization of the concept of *norm* leads translators to a better understanding of translation strategies. Munday (2008, p. 112) believes that norms are components “peculiar to cultures, societies, and time, being sociocultural limitations which are acquired by persons during the educational and socializing processes;” however, he still states that the most effective definition of the concept of norm is outlined by Toury (2004):

The translation of general values or ideas shared by a community—as to what is right or wrong, adequate or inadequate—into performance instructions appropriate for and applicable to particular situations, specifying what is prescribed and forbidden as well as what is tolerated and permitted in a certain behavioral dimension. (p. 205)

Toury (1995) introduced three sorts of norms in translation: Initial, preliminary, and operational. Initial norms deal with acceptable and adequate kind of translation, whereas preliminary norms refer to “translation policy and directness of translation” (p. 113). According to Toury (1995), the operational norms stand for the direct decision regarding translation during the act of translation. Before that, Toury (1980) outlined an acceptable translation as a kind of translation which is oriented toward the norms of TL and its culture.

Among the works applied on the field of AVT, Sedighi and Najian Tabrizi (2012) aimed at investigating the frequent methods in dubbing taboo words and sentences in some dubbed romantic movies from English into Persian after the Islamic Revolution of Iran via Toury’s (1995) suggested framework for norm classification. Their study conjointly investigated the norms that contributed dubbers and movie subtitlers to dub the taboo words from English into Persian throughout that period of time. Besides, they investigated that “euphemism” with 73% had the topmost frequency in dubbing the taboos in the romantic movies.

Besides, in line with Armellino (2008), one of the most demanding tasks in the field of AVT deals with the translation of cultural items. Investigating the translation of cultural items in the *Scent of a Woman* movie. Armellino (2008) states that the final translation must possess the original features of the SL culture and translators must respect all the cultural differences therein.

Furthermore, Vossoughi and Etemad Hosseini (2013) expressed that within the method of translation, culture is among the foremost factors which cause a myriad of problems, particularly when the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) belong to completely different cultures. The matter even deteriorates confronting those concepts existing in each ST and TT, but with completely different expressive meaning. Through their study, they aimed to research the norms of translating taboo words and concepts after the Islamic Revolution of Iran through applying Toury’s (1995) framework for classification of norms in translation studies. The corpus of their study was to work on Coelho’s novels between 1990 and 2005 and their Persian translations. In sum, they found out that, in Iran, the dominant ideology was a crucial aspect in the process of decision making by translators.

Venuti’s strategies in translation

The process of translation between two languages is not only an act of transferring the SL words into the TL; translation deals with communication between different cultures, too. Nida (1964) pointed out that “the larger cultural context is of utmost importance in understanding the meaning of any message; for words have meanings only in terms of the total cultural setting” (p. 244).

Domestication and foreignization are two fundamental strategies presented by American translation theorist Venuti. According to Venuti (1995), domestication refers to “an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to TL cultural values, bring the author back home,” whereas foreignization is “an ethnodeliant pressure on those (cultural) values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad” (p. 20). In one word, domestication is the strategy of making the ST closely adaptive to the culture of the TL, and foreignization is the strategy of keeping information from the SL which intentionally breaks the conventions of TL to maintain its meaning. Applying Venuti’s (1995) strategies in the translation of cultural items, the applied strategies were interpreted to see whether the applied strategies in translating taboo expressions in American movies were adaptive to the Iranian culture or not.

Taking a comprehensive look at this issue, the following research questions were formed:

1. What are the different strategies used for the translation of culture-bound elements?
2. What is the most frequent strategy used for the translation of taboo expressions into the target language?
3. Are the applied strategies distributed equally in rendering the selected movies in this study?

Methodology

Materials

The materials used in the present study consisted of five randomly-selected American action movies dubbed by IRIB in 2013. A brief introduction of these movies is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. A Brief Introduction of the Movies

No.	Movies	Release Year	Original Run Time (Min)	Dubbed Run Time (Min)	Director
1	Family Business	1989	110	85	Sidney Lumet
2	Lethal Weapon 3	1992	118	78	Richard Donner
3	Sudden Death	1995	110	104	Petter Hyams
4	Welcome to Collinwood	2002	86	70	Mikael Solomon
5	Anaconda	2004	96	90	Dwight H. Little

After selecting these movies, the original versions were compared with their dubbed ones to find and extract the taboo expressions.

Procedure

After collecting the American Hollywood movies, from Soroush Sima Company, which is a highly qualified official AVT center in Iran, the researchers compared the two versions of the movies with each other to search for the taboo expressions and the applied strategies by audiovisual translators in rendition of these movies.

Besides, some criteria were considered for selecting these American movies:

1. Selecting dubbed movies and not subtitled ones
2. Gathering the movies from Soroush Sima Company
3. Selecting movies with a high frequency of taboo words
4. Selecting movies in the action genre

After eliciting the data by comparing the original and dubbed versions of the movies, the researchers checked them to see whether they were adaptive to domestication and foreignization, that is, Venuti's (1995) cultural strategies in translation studies. Actually, the required data were collected through using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 22), and a frequency table was applied as a foreground for the investigation. Then, chi-square was run to recognize the quality and adaptive strategies in translating the taboo expressions.

Results

Data Analysis

Comparing the original and dubbed versions of the movies, a pattern was gained for rendering the SL taboos to the TL. According to this pattern:

1. Some of the SL taboos were translated into taboos or less offensive taboos in the TL.
2. Some other SL taboos were rendered into nontaboo expressions in the TL.
3. Some of the SL taboos were euphemized.
4. Some of the SL taboos were omitted.

Accordingly, the applied strategies were analyzed and their frequencies are presented in Table 2:

Table 2. Cross-Tabulation of the Movies and Strategies

Strategies	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Percentage	
1 = Taboo to Taboo	1.006	23	5	34	6	74	18.82	
2 = Taboo to Nontaboo	2.003	14	17	3	10	4	48	12.21
3 = Euphemism	3.008	8	21	4	11	7	51	12.97
4 = Deletion	4.003	35	68	15	64	38	220	55.97
Total	63	129	27	119	55	393	100	

As to Table 2, there were 393 cases of taboos observed in the original versions of the movies. Besides, “deletion” with the frequency of 55.97% was the topmost applied strategy among other strategies.

Moreover, the chi-square results indicated that $\chi^2(12, N = 5) = 23.08, p = 0$, considering $**p < 0.05$ which means that the applied strategies had not the same distribution among the movies. In other words, as the chi-square results in Table 3 indicates, the same strategies were applied in the rendition of these American action movies, but the distribution of the applied strategies were not the same:

Table 3. Chi-Square Results

Chi-Square	Value	Asymp. <i>df</i>	Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23.083 ^{a*}	12	.027
Likelihood Ratio	22.524	12	.032
Linear-by-Linear Association	.072	1	.789
N of Valid Cases	393		

* Pearson chi-square is significant at 0.05 levels (2-tailed).

Discussion

Comparing the dubbed movies with their original versions, a pattern was gained for taboo translation in the dubbed movies in IRIB. Through this pattern, some taboo expressions were translated into less offensive taboo words in the TL. Some other taboos were rendered into nontaboo words too.

Euphemism, as a form of disguising strongly offensive taboo words into less offensive ones, was another strategy in rendering audiovisual materials.

Deletion, with the highest frequency (i.e., 55.97%) in the process of rendering audiovisual materials, leads us completely to the world of censorship. Sometimes, American people use some special taboo words just for emphasizing a certain part of their utterances. This routine method of putting stress on a certain part of speaking through using taboo expressions is not acceptable in the Iranian culture. Adverb using is the topmost used strategy—if not the only—to emphasize is considered a special part of utterances in the Iranian culture, instead. Moreover, “scene omission” was amongst other strategies in AVT, especially in the dubbing field. Thus, “scene omission” is the significant reason for the differences between the original and dubbed runtime, according to Table 3.1. Through this strategy, offensive scenes that are not compatible with the TL culture must be omitted. In other words, the case of censorship in these movies ranged from word units (i.e., censoring taboo words) to the censorship of the scenes.

Therefore, the first research question is already answered and the applied strategies for rendering taboo expressions were: “translating taboos of the SL into taboos or less offensive taboos in the TL,” “translating taboos of the SL into nontaboos in the TL,” “euphemism,” and “deletion.”

Regarding the second research question, it was observed that “deletion” with the frequency of 55.97% was the topmost used strategy in rendering these American movies by the Iranian audiovisual translators.

As to the third research question, it was observed that $\chi^2(12, N = 5) = 23.08, p = 0$, considering $**p < 0.05$, which means that the applied strategies had not the same distribution among the movies, but the applied strategies were the same.

Furthermore, it is clear that not all the information rushing into society through audiovisual materials can aid the human growth, but sometimes it can act vice versa. Entering these materials to other countries with different cultures, these audiovisual materials must be changed in order to be compatible with the TL culture.

In order to create a fluent TT, audiovisual translators prefer to adapt the text according to the TL culture. In other words, almost all the audiovisual translators were completely familiar with the Iranian culture, and they knew that they must translate the SL in a way compatible to the TL culture. Domestication, as to Venuti (1995), is highly adaptive to the TL culture; therefore, audiovisual translators try to render taboo expressions in a way that TL audience do not find it offensive with their cultural values. Hence, “deletion,” “translating taboos to nontaboo expressions in TL culture,” and “euphemism” were the applied strategies adaptive to Venuti’s (1995) domestication which was applied in 81.15% of cases. Besides, in only 18.82% of the cases, foreignization was applied through “translating taboo words into their taboo equivalent in TL culture.” Therefore, it can be concluded that the Iranian audiovisual translators mainly tend to domesticate the cultural-specific items.

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