

Translation Quality Assessment in Screen Translation

Sajjad Kianbakht

IAU, South Tehran Branch

Abstract

Screen Translation as a branch of Audiovisual Translation is a powerful activity, which is a significant form of intercultural communication (Diaz Cintas, 2009). Considering the overdeveloping prominence of Screen Translation, the present research looks into Screen Translation through the lens of humor translation quality assessment and subtitling strategies in an anthology of Woody Allen's romantic comedy films. More specifically, the present study is a descriptive comparative content analysis based on the dialogues from an anthology of Woody Allen's films and their relevant Persian translations. We used Schmitz' model (2002) for categorization of humor as well as the typology of subtitling strategies proposed by Gottlieb (2001) as the theoretical frameworks to assess the quality of Persian translation of the films. Since there has been no such study on Screen Translation focusing on the humor translation quality assessment in Iran up to this point, one of the major aims of this study was to explore the most successful used strategy in rendering the humorous effects of the original films into Persian.

Key Words: Humor, Screen translation, Translation quality assessment.

1. Introduction

Screen translation is a relatively new branch of translation that developed rather dynamically. Increasing number of conferences, courses and workshops on the topic, as well as the creation of organizations of screen translators attest to its growing importance. It involves the use of sound and imagery in translation, in order to express the translated message as fully as possible. In its contemporary form, screen translation embraces the interpretation as well as the clarification of verbal symbols by means of non-verbal symbols; to make the cultural and linguistic contexts of the original films comprehensible for the target audience. The term screen translation emphasizes the locative of medium where the translation products appears, namely the TV, cinema, or video screen.

Diaz Cintas (2009, p.6) believes that “it is evident that the way in which we interact has changed and is still constantly changing and these changes create new communication needs”. He also considers Screen Translation, a branch of Audiovisual Translation (AVT), a powerful activity which is a significant form of intercultural communication. Humor, another major variable of the present study, is an essential part of everyday communication and an important component of innumerable literary works, films and of art in general. It is not only rooted in a specific cultural and linguistic context, but it is also an indispensable part of intercultural communication and mass entertainment. The ability to comprehend, appreciate, and produce humorous elements is central to human culture and social interaction, and hence the area of humor and its translation quality assessment merits an academic study.

Considering the above-mentioned perspectives and the over developing prominence of screen translation and “the dearth of serious work on humor translation in TS” (Vandaele, 2002c), the present research explores the quality of Persian translation of humor in an anthology of Woody Allen's films including “Annie Hall” and “Midnight in Paris” through the translators' adopted subtitling strategies. The present researcher carried out a descriptive comparative content analysis of the dialogues and the relevant Persian subtitles of Woody Allen's aforementioned films. To sum up, the researcher used Schmitz' model (2002) for categorization of humor as well as the typology of subtitling strategies proposed by Gottlieb (2001) as the theoretical frameworks to assess the quality of Persian translation of the films and to find out what the subtitler has done in every segment of the films in which the use of humor was present.

2. Theoretical Background

Subtitling may be defined as a translation practice that consists of presenting a written text, generally on the lower part of the screen, the discursive element that appear in the image and the information that is contained on the soundtrack (Diaz Cintas & Remael, 2007, p.8). Traditionally, it is believed that there are two types of subtitles: interlingual subtitles, which imply transfer from a SL into a TL, and intralingual subtitles, for which there is no change of language (Diaz Cintas, 2003). According to Gottlieb (2004), interlingual subtitling, having societal and language-political implications, is instrumental in improving reading skills, boosting foreign language skills, facilitating easy and cheap international program exchange, and cementing the dominance of English.

Gottlieb (2001, pp.1010) further believes that to assess the quality of a specific subtitling, the rendering of each verbal segment of a film must be analyzed with regard to its stylistic and semantic values. Accordingly, he has proposed ten translation strategies for subtitling films as follows:

1. *Expansion* is used when the original text requires an explanation because of some cultural nuance not retrievable in the target language.
2. *Paraphrase* is resorted to in cases where the phraseology of the original cannot be reconstructed in the same syntactic way in the target language.
3. *Transfer* refers to the strategy of translating the source text completely and accurately.
4. *Imitation* maintains the same forms, typically in the case of names of people and places.
5. *Transcription* is used in those cases where a term is unusual even in the source text, for example, the use of a third language or nonsense language.
6. *Dislocation* is adopted when the original text employs some sort of special effect, e.g., a silly song in a cartoon film where the translation of the effect is more important than the content.
7. *Condensation* that is, the shortening of the text in the least obtrusive way possible seems to be the typical strategy used in translation of subtitles.
8. *Decimation* is an extreme form of condensation where perhaps for reasons of discourse speed, even potentially important elements are omitted.
9. *Deletion* refers to the total elimination of parts of a text.
10. *Resignation* describes the strategy adopted when no translation solution can be found and meaning is inevitably lost.

He claims that these strategies can be found in translation of different genres including humor, which is an integral part of western cultures and films. Humor involves different modes and falls into different groups if viewed from different angles and for different purposes. It has been categorized into certain types by different scholars. Raphaelson-West (1989, p.130) divided humor into three groups: linguistic humor like puns and word plays, cultural humor such as ethnic ones and universal humor, the unexpected, for example. Similarly, Schmitz (2002, p. 89) has categorized humor into three types: 1) universal humor, 2) culture-based humor, and 3) language-based humor. Schmitz (2002) has defined the universal type of humor as reality-based humor induced mainly by the context and the general functioning of the world. He has explained the second type or culture-based humor as being embedded in the source culture and finally he has explicated the linguistic type as word-based humor produced by linguistic devices such as idioms, slangs, and wordplays and so on.

3. Methodology

The present research used Schmitz' (2002) categorization of humor as well as the typology of subtitling strategies proposed by Gottlieb (2001, p.1010) as the theoretical frameworks to assess the quality of Persian subtitling of the Woody Allen's films. According to Gottlieb (2001), to assess the quality of a specific subtitling, the translation of each verbal segment of film must be analyzed according to its stylistic and semantic values.

3.1. Corpus

The corpora of the present study are the dialogues from an anthology of Woody Allen's films including "Annie Hall" and "Midnight in Paris" and their relevant Persian subtitles. These films are Woody Allen's masterpieces as one of the greatest humorists ever seen. "Midnight in Paris" was premiered at the 2011 Cannes Film Festival and won both the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay and the Golden Globe Awards for Best Screenplay.

Along with the Academy Award for Best Picture, “Annie Hall” won Oscars in three other categories: two for Allen (Best Director and Best Original Screenplay), and Keaton for Best Actress.

A brief summary of the plots is as follows:

Midnight in Paris is an American 2011 romantic comedy film written and directed by Allen. Gil, a successful but distracted Hollywood screenwriter, and his fiancée, Inez, are in Paris, vacationing with Inez's wealthy, conservative parents. Gil is struggling to finish his first novel, which is about a man who works in a nostalgia shop, but Inez and her parents are critical and dismissive of Gil's desire to give up his Hollywood career in order to continue to write as he wishes. One night their friends invite Inez and Gil to go dancing. Inez accepts but Gil declines and chooses to return to the hotel through the streets of Paris, eventually becoming lost. As he stops, bells chime midnight and an antique car pulls up, and the passengers dressed in 1920s clothing urge Gil to join them. They go to a bar, where Gil comes to realize that he has been transported to the 1920s, an era he admires and idolizes in the novel he is writing. He encounters Cole Porter, Josephine Baker, and Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald, who take him to meet Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway agrees to show Gil's novel to Gertrude Stein, and Gil goes to fetch his manuscript from his hotel. Over the next few days, Gil spends each night in the past during which he goes through a lot of humorous events.

Annie Hall is a 1977 American romantic comedy film directed by Woody Allen from a screenplay he co-wrote with Marshall Brickman. The film is a major turning point in Allen's career which unlike his other comedies introduced a level of seriousness. The film is about a comedian, Alvy Singer, who falls in love with Annie Hall. Both of the characters are completely different but both strikingly entertaining and unusual. Alvy is an extreme pessimist that obsesses over the subject of death and has very sarcastic and cynical views about the world and the people around him. Annie is a ditsy and clumsy talented singer and photographer. When Alvy and Annie meet for the first time, they are instantly attracted to each other and as a result, their conversations are awkward but nevertheless adorable. The film takes you through the couple's love life by the means of humor, before and after their relationship. Woody Allen has used the usual humorous devices found in comedy genres in order to produce humorous effects in these films. The films include substantial number of humorous elements, words, and expressions, making them suitable for the purposes of this research.

3.2. Procedure

The data collection and analysis of the present study took place in three phases:

In the first stage the researcher identified the humorous elements in the films based on Schmitz' categorization of humor (2002), i.e. universal humor, culture-based humor, and language-based humor mentioned above.

The second step was to prepare the transcriptions of the dialogues of the films as well as their relevant subtitles in Persian.

The next stage was the analysis and comparison of the dialogues in English and their corresponding Persian renderings in order to find out the answers to the research questions. For the analysis of the subtitling of the corpora, Gottlieb's aforementioned recapitulation of the classification of subtitling strategies was employed (2001, p.1010).

4. Findings

Eighty six humorous elements were detected and analyzed in the source texts during this research. In order to conduct this part of the study, the researcher used Table 1 below which was designed by Jose Martinez-Sierra (2005, p. 293), operationalized it for the purposes of the present research. In the following tables the Persian versions were given according to UN system of transliteration. Due to the space limitations of this article, only six examples, two for each top three strategies with the highest frequency have been presented. These three strategies together make up 57cases with approximately 61% of the total frequencies.

Table 1: Details of Data Analysis Utilizing Martinez Model

Film	Annie Hall.
Context	Alvy and the fan guy shake hands and Alvy pats the man's arm. The man in turn looks over his shoulder and calls another man. All excited now, he points to Alvy and calls out: "This is Alvy Singer!" Alvy looks impatient.
Source Version	Alvy: I need a large polo mallet!
Humorous Load	Universal.
Persian Subtitling	Alvy: Man alān ye chūbe chowgān mīkhām!
Subtitling Strategy	Transfer.

The above-mentioned explanation is applied to all the following tables in this section.

Table 2:

Film	Midnight in Paris.
Context	At the late night café Fitzgerald, Zelda and Gil meet Ernest Hemingway. Zelda having some issues with Hemingway, decided to go with Juan Belmonte the Spanish bullfighter.
Source Version	Zelda: If you're going to stay and drink with him I'm going with <i>the toreador</i> .
Humorous Load	Cultural.
Persian Subtitling	Zelda: Tow mītūnī īnjā bemūnī va bā dūstet mashrūb bokhowrī, ammā man bā īn <i>gāvbāzeh</i> mīram.
Subtitling Strategy	Transfer.

Table 3:

Film	Annie Hall.
Context	Annie and Alvy are talking about their first big romance as they're walking along the shore at the ocean front.
Source Version	Annie: Oh, God, you should've seen what I looked like then. Alvy: Oh, I can imagine. <i>Probably the wife of an astronaut.</i>
Humorous Load	Cultural.
Persian Subtitling	Annie: Bāyad mīdīdī ūn mowqeh che tīpī dāshtam. Alvy: Mītūnam tasavowr konam. <i>Hatman mesle fālbīnhā būdī.</i>
Subtitling Strategy	Dislocation.

Table 4:

Film	Midnight in Paris.
Context	Scott Fitzgerald is greeting Gil in the night party.
Source Version	Scott: Scott Fitzgerald, and who are you <i>old sport</i> ?
Humorous Load	Cultural.
Persian Subtitling	Scott: Vā shomā che kasī hastīn <i>jenāb</i> ?
Subtitling Strategy	Dislocation.

Table 5:

Film	Annie Hall.
Context	They're in a Hollywood Christmas party, complete with music, circulating waiters, holding out trays of drinks. Rob and Alvy observe the guests. Rob nods his head toward a tall peachy woman dressed all in white with the visible panty line, meanwhile the woman in white starts walking toward them.
Source Version	Rob: If she comes over here, Max, <i>my brain is going to turn into guacamole.</i> Alvy: I'll handle it.
Humorous Load	Cultural.
Persian Subtitling	Rob: Ageh ūmad īnvar, <i>say kon khūnsard bāshī.</i> Alvy: Man hallesh mīkonam.
Subtitling Strategy	Resignation.

Table 6:

Film	Midnight in Paris.
Context	Adriana is with Gil in the party. Hemingway flatteringly wants to gain her attention.
Source Version	Hemingway: Have you ever <i>hunted</i> ? Adriana: No. Hemingway: (to Gil) You? Gil: <i>Only for bargains</i> .
Humorous Load	Linguistic.
Persian Subtitling	Hemingway: Tā hālā shekār raftī? Adriana: Na. Hemingway: Tow chī? Gil: <i>Faqat barāye shekāre qarqāvol</i> .
Subtitling Strategy	Resignation.

After analyzing the data, the summary of the findings are presented in the form of a descriptive table for the films, which shows the frequency and percentage of the ten subtitling strategies. Table 7 specifies the frequency and percentage of different subtitling strategies in the films under investigation.

Table 7: Total Frequency and Percentage of Strategies Used in the Films.

Kind of Strategy	Total Number	Per Centum
Transfer	25	26.6
Dislocation	17	18.08
Resignation	15	15.95
Imitation	10	10.63
Paraphrase	7	7.44
Condensation	6	6.38
Expansion	5	5.31
Deletion	4	4.25
Decimation	3	3.19
Transcription	2	2.12

The analysis of the results shows that different subtitling strategies have been adopted by the translators in rendering the humorous elements. The identified strategies are as follows:

Transfer is the most frequently used strategy in all three humor categories with 25 cases. The strategies from the most frequently used to the least frequently used are: transfer 25 cases(26.6%); dislocation 17 cases(18.08%); resignation 15 cases(15.95%); imitation 10 cases(10.63%); paraphrase 7 cases(7.44%); condensation 6 cases(6.38%); expansion 5 cases (5.31%); deletion 4 cases(4.25%); decimation 3 cases(3.19%); transcription 2 cases(2.12%).

5. Discussion

The main purpose of the present research was to find out the most and the least frequently used subtitling strategies in Persian translation of an anthology of Woody Allen's romantic comedy films as well as the most successful used strategy in rendering the humorous effects of the original films into Persian. All the selected humorous elements of the two films including 86 cases were analyzed and then categorized on the basis of the theoretical frameworks of the present research. The quality assessment of the data collected in this research indicated that different subtitling strategies have been applied by the translators in rendering humorous elements of the aforementioned American romantic comedy films into Persian with some degree of variation in the distribution of strategies among the films. In some cases, more than one strategy was used to translate a stretch of words in a single film frame. The results showed that *transfer* subtitling strategy, with a remarkably high rate of occurrence, was the most frequently used strategy in all three humor categories.

Furthermore, based on the theoretical frameworks of the present research and content analysis of the original films as well as the quality assessment of the translated versions, *transfer* strategy was also the most successful in rendering the humorous effects of the original films into Persian.

Moreover, *dislocation, resignation, imitation, paraphrase* were ranked between second to fifth and *condensation, expansion, deletion, decimation* and *transcription* were ranked between sixth to tenth in the order from the most frequently used to the least frequently used strategies.

In universal humor category, where the whole story is to convey the humorous effect and message, which can be conceived in all languages and cultures, the translation is carried out with the least possible difficulties and in the most cases the *transfer* subtitling strategy has been the first and most frequently used strategy. In translating cultural humor category, the translator faces two sorts of challenges. The first one is related to rendering cultural notions and concepts of the original films and the second one is the specific linguistic devices used in the original films. In this category of humorous discourses, in cases where the culture-bound elements are neutralized or generalized, cultural sense of the original is missed and the translation does not read as humorous as the original.

In subtitling linguistic humor category, the translators are faced with a kind of dilemma. The difficulty arises when the linguistic devices such as puns play roles in making the discourse humorous. When there is no one to one equivalent in terms of linguistic units and rhetorical devices like puns in TL, the loss of meaning seems inevitable. In such cases the humor is missed in the translation, the text reads as a neutralized one and subsequently no sense of humor is perceived in TT.

In addition, the quality assessment of Persian translation of the corpora in this research showed that the subtitlers of Woody Allen's films suffer from a number of shortcomings that may be summarized as follows:

- (1) Poor knowledge of English is seemingly the source of considerable number of their mistakes (approximately 20% of the cases);
- (2) Lack of scientific methods and mastery over subtitling strategies would not allow translators to follow straightforward guidelines in their course of translating humor;
- (3) Ignorance and carelessness toward cultural notions and connotations seem to be the cause of the loss of humorous effects of the original cultural concepts in TT.

To conclude, the fast growing increase in new translational activities requires translators to learn new skills and techniques. It would be satisfactory to include appropriate up-to-date training courses at Iranian universities including AVT training courses, in the same way that the other areas of translation are being taught. Finally, the present researcher hopes the findings of this study would be useful for translation scholars, those interested in the topic as well as those planning to start a career in Screen Translation, especially subtitling.

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