The Politics of Translation: Paratextual Analysis of Persian Translations of American Literary Works in Two Historical Contexts[1]

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Abstract

The present study investigates the impact of political relationships on intercultural transfer between Iran and the United States by examining the presentation of Persian translations of American literary works published in Iran from 1953 to 2004. Focusing on the transformation of the Iran-United States relationship following Iran's 1979 Revolution, this research aims to identify any variations in the paratexts surrounding these translations. By analyzing the paratexts, the study sheds light on how periods of peace and conflict between the two nations have influenced intercultural transfer and the production of literary translations. The theoretical framework draws on Bourdieu's concept of the social formation process of cultural products, highlighting the specific social operations involved in the selection, presentation, and reception of translations. In order to examine changes in the presentation of Persian translations of American literary works over time, the paratexts accompanying 175 translations published in Iran during two historical periods (1953–1979 and 1979–2004) were thematically analyzed using the qualitative textual analysis software MAXqda 2020. These periods are significant as they manifest dramatic shifts in the politics of Iran on both national and international levels. The analysis identified six major themes within the paratextual corpus: 'Source Text Author,' 'Source Text,' 'Socio-political Concerns,' 'Translation and Publication,' 'Literature,' and 'Readership.' While these themes persisted across both periods, the diachronic analysis revealed shifts in their coverage, topics, and content. These findings contribute to the understanding of paratextual materials as politicized objects that not only shape ideological perceptions of the source culture but also reflect the social, political, and cultural discourse within the field of literary translation.

Keywords: American literature, Iran's 1979 Revolution, Paratext, Persian translation, Politics

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Introduction and Background

The interaction between translation and politics has been a long-standing subject of study. Investigating the political role of translation began in disciplines like history, sociology, international politics, and social movement studies, while translation studies seemed not receptive to dialogue with them (Evans & Fernández, 2018). However, this trend seems to have changed in recent years. Now, a rich body of work in translation studies focuses on the relationship between translation and politics. Translation Studies has shown a great potential to study the political aspects of translation theoretically and practically.

Studying the political aspects of translation can be divided into two main areas. Firstly, 'translation of politics', which examines the role of translation in the formation and transformation of political practices; and secondly, 'politics of translation', which regards translation as both a political means and a politicized object and examines the place of translation within political structures (Evans & Fernández, 2018). Focusing on the politics of literary translation, Jones (2018) states that literary translation can be political since literature engages with the world and thus with politics. Simon (2013, p.13) refers to the paradoxical nature of translation as a bridge "that separates as much as it joins" and argues that translations undertaken in situations of conflict between states are in fact acknowledging the differences between the states. Researching on Arabic translations of modern Hebrew literature, Kayyal (2004) presumes that at the time of conflict,

> *translation activity will cease to be a vehicle for fruitful intercultural dialogue, and will become an arena of struggle between political and ideological viewpoints. The considerations of translators, editors and publishers in the selection, translation and publication of literary works will no longer be purely literary; they will be primarily political and ideological, whether the purpose of the translation is to advance the cause of peace and understanding between the peoples concerned, or whether it is to "know one's enemy". (p. 530)*

According to Jones (2018, p. 310), "[l]iterary translations can convey political messages in three key ways: which texts are chosen for translation, how the translator translates, and how they are presented to readers". Translators and publishers present their works to readers through paratexts. Genette (1997, p.1) refers to the paratext as "accompanying productions" which surround, extend and present a text. The political motivation for publishing translated literature is often stated in the paratexts surrounding the translation, such as the introduction, preface, foreword, and cover blurbs (Jones, 2018). Paratexts can serve diverse functions, which can be discovered by conducting extensive empirical and inductive studies through "individual, work-by-work analysis (and synthesis)" (Genette, 1997, p. 13). Critical description and analysis of paratextual elements surrounding translated texts provide researchers with valuable information regarding texts, translations, the context in which they appeared, and the views of the human agents involved (Tahir-Gürçağlar, 2002).

With regard to the dramatic shift in political and cultural relations between Iran and the United States and the systemic ideological shifts in Iran following the 1979 Revolution, the present study seeks to answer this question:

How did the paratextual content accompanying Persian translations of American literary works change across the two historical periods of 1953–1979 and 1979–2004?

Paratexts serve to present translation works. Examining the content and variations of paratexts of Persian translations of American literary works over time, provides valuable insights into the potential impact of peace and conflict situations between the two nations on the presentation of translated works.

The Fields of Power and Cultural Production in the Time Period under Study

Following the 1953 coup d'état in Iran staged by the US Central Intelligence Agency aiming at returning the Shah to power (Abrahamian, 2013), the Shah of Iran "came to be seen as the puppet of Western, primarily American, interests, which had directly intervened to overthrow the legitimate government of Iran and to

restore him to his throne in the pursuit of their own ends" (Avery, 2007, p. 264). In 1955, Iran and the US signed the Treaty of Amity, emphasizing firm and enduring peace and sincere friendship between the two states, making Iran the most important ally of the US in the Middle East. In the years that followed, Iran witnessed the conspicuous presence of Americans in politics and society (Clawson & Rubin, 2005). In the early 1960s, Iran experienced a number of social reforms, the White Revolution, including land reforms, educational and healthcare reforms, and women's rights, among others, which resulted in both positive and negative responses (Amanat, 2017). Negative responses to the White Revolution were mostly initiated by the clergy, whose objection eventually led to Iran's 1979 Revolution. By the Islamic Revolution in 1979, with the 'Neither East, nor West' motto in its foreign policy, the relationship between Iran and the US started to decline. Following the 1979 seizure of the American Embassy by some Iranian students, the termination of diplomatic relationships between Iran and the US was declared by the US president and welcomed by the Iran's revolution leader. Ever since, the relationship between the two states has been marked by numerous conflicts and a sense of everlasting hostility. In the first year after the Revolution, Iran witnessed power struggles between various parties leading to a referendum in the same year and the establishment of an Islamic Republic (Abrahamian, 2008). In 1980 Iraq invaded Iran and started one of the "longest conventional wars of the twentieth century" (Johnson, 2011, p. 5), which lasted for eight years till 1988. The years 1989 to 1997 corresponding to eight years of the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani, are marked by reconstruction programs by the government resulting in some social and economic recovery in Iran. In the following years to 2004, Iran experienced reform programs of Khatami administration.

In the 1950s, Iran experienced exponential growth in the field of cultural production thanks to the emergence of several institutions for the publication of books and translation, as well as several plans for supporting translation and its distribution (Azarang, 2016). Among the major institutions that were established in the early 1950s, Azarang named Bongah-e Tarjomeh va Nashr-e Ketab, Tehran

branch of the Franklin Book Programs and Nil Publishing House. Since the emergence of publishing in Iran, no organization –probably except for Dar al-Tebayeh [House of Printing] and Dar al-Tarjome Naseri [Naseri Translation House] – could influence the publishing field in Iran as much as Franklin (Azarang, 2016). The three institutions stopped their activities in the years leading to the 1979 Revolution. The first decade after the Revolution, corresponding to the Iran-Iraq war, witnessed a decline in cultural production. In the same vein, translation in this period was not dynamic; instead of introducing innovations, new literature and new styles, translation was concerned with familiar clichés that did not require energy to confront, which caused the stagnation of translated literature (Farahzad, 2011). By the end of the war and some social and economic recovery, the infrastructure for the book publishing market reached a more appropriate condition (Azarang, 2016).

Framework

The work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has been largely used in the field of translation to explore and theorize the social nature of translation practices (Baker & Saldanha, 2009). The main concepts translation scholars have adopted from Bourdieu's sociology include field, habitus, and different forms of capital. Gouanvic (2002), Sela-Sheffy (2005), and Buzelin (2014) are among the translation scholars who applied Bourdieusian concepts to translation, improving the socio-historical perspective of Translation Studies. However, Bourdieu's views on the sociological formation process of cultural products have largely remained neglected in Translation Studies. In his conceptualization of the international circulation of ideas, Bourdieu (1999) refers to the sociological formation process of cultural products. He believes the transfer process from a foreign field to a domestic one comprises a series of social operations. These social processes are the process of selection, the process of labeling and classification and the process of reading and reception. Bourdieu (1999) further explains that the process of selection deals with questions such as what is translated, who it is translated by and who publishes it. Selection of a work for translation and publication in a foreign country is not a random choice. Translators and publishers often pursue their specific goals in

producing a translation, and they are further supported or hindered by power. To Bourdieu (1999), the condition and manner in which texts are selected for translation are important areas of inquiry from both scientific and practical perspectives. The process of labelling and classification is related to the presentation of a work and includes all labels attached to a translation. Bourdieu (1999) believes all labels are meaningful and classifies the translated work into a specific category. The process of reading and reception takes into account the difference between the reception field of the translation and the production field of the original. Sometimes the difference is so significant that it "can actually create fictitious oppositions between similar things, and false parallels between things that are fundamentally different"; neither is desirable in translation (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 225).

The present study draws on the second operation of Bourdieu's social formation process of cultural products, which is the process of labeling and classification. This process addresses how a cultural product is presented to readers by new labels often absent in the original product. Bourdieu (1999) refers to prefaces as significant labels having meaningful implications. To Bourdieu, prefaces are socially constructed and serve to play certain social functions. This study relies on Bourdieu's social approach to paratexts to investigate how paratextual elements have changed across two diverse sociopolitical contexts in Iran. Since Bourdieu does not elaborate on the methodological approach to study prefaces, a potential methodology relying on textual analysis is adopted in this study.

Literature Review

Most empirical research in the sociology of translation has borrowed theoretical groundwork rooted in contemporary sociological theory. According to Baker and Saldanha (2009), the most influential approaches originated in social sciences and successfully applied to explore the social nature of translation are so far proposed by Bourdieu (1993), Latour (1987) and Luhmann (1986). Bourdieu's cultural sociology is among the most significant theories used to investigate different sociological issues in translation. Haddidian-Moghaddam (2014) uses Bourdieu's

cultural sociology to explore the agency of translators and publishers of novels from English in modern Iran, taking into account their decision-making process, motives, and factors that constrain or increase their agency. He believes translations from English enjoy a prominent status in modern Iran and have contributed to the modernization of Iran and the development of Persian literature by introducing new literary genres. Adapting Bourdieusian concepts of field and habitus, Ma'azallahi (2017) explores the 'translatorial habitus' and 'authorial habitus' and their interrelations in the field of cultural production in Iran between 1941 and 1966. Her findings indicate that translatorial habitus drew influences from the adjacent fields of practice and exerted momentous impacts upon them in the specified time period.

A few studies show how political conflicts between cultures can influence intercultural dialogue. Researching Arabic translations of Modern Hebrew literature, Kayyal (2004) concludes that in a state of violent national conflict, translation activity produces translations whose purpose is ideological rather than literary, so translations are not accepted as literary creations but as documents reflecting the culture of the other. Sayaheen (2015) uses paratexts as a source of analysis to investigate the effect of the September 11 attacks on the production and reception of works translated from Arabic and published in the US. He examines and compares the paratexts of sixteen translations of Arabic works translated into English and published in the US before and after the September 11 attacks and reports the rise of particular ideological and theological stands in the post-September 11 era. In a similar study, Gharehgozlou (2018) thematically analyzes the paratexts accompanying English translations of Persian literary works published between 1925 and 2015 and compares the results across three historical periods—the reign of Reza Shah, the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah and post-revolution era. The results reveal significant changes in the paratextual content from one period to another, whereby the discourse on Iran's ongoing social and political contexts significantly increased over time while the topic of translation saw a drastic decrease.

Methodology

The scope of the present study is delimited from two important aspects for the sake of the feasibility of the study. First, the study is temporally delimited to focus on Persian translations of American literary works published in Iran in two successive periods: 25 years before the 1979 Revolution (1953–1979) and 25 years after this significant political turning point in the history of Iran (1979–2004). The rationale behind this stems from the fact that the period spanning from 1953 to 1979 is widely recognized as a phase characterized by the most harmonious diplomatic ties between the Iranian and American governments. This period is marked by the conspicuous presence of Americans in the politics and society of Iran due to a coup d'état in 1953 staged by the US Central Intelligence Agency (Abrahamian, 2001). In order to work on an equal period in the post-Revolution era, a period of 25 years spanning from 1979 to 2004 was selected. The second period is marked by the termination of relationships between Iran and the US following the 1979 seizure of the American Embassy by some Iranian students and a sense of eternal hostility between the two states (Abrahamian, 2013).

The second delimitation of the present study is concerned with the scope of the paratextual corpus under the study. Recruiting translated works for building a paratextual corpus is based on the technique of purposive sampling. This is a common technique in corpus building since it allows researchers to control aspects of production, such as authorship and date of publication (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013). Based on this technique, a list of the top 100 American literary works, ranked in order of popularity, chosen by American literature teachers across the US, was used as the source of investigation[4]. The works were mostly novels authored by winners of international and American literature prizes, such as the Noble Prize and Pulitzer Prize. Popular works were selected for the study since they were more likely to get translated into Persian.

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4. Available at https://www.perfectionlearning.com/top-100-american-literature-titles

Taking a historical approach, this study uses paratexts surrounding translations to find out how the Persian translations of American literature were presented to Iranian readers across the two historical periods marked by the dramatic shift in the relationship between Iran and the US and the systemic ideological shifts in Iran. In order to compile a corpus of the paratexts accompanying the Persian translations of the books under investigation, the researchers referred to the National Library and Archive of Iran. Each translation book was examined separately to check if it contained paratexts. The paratexts were scanned and converted to machine-readable texts. The texts were then imported into the qualitative textual analysis software MAXqda 2020. Since the study aimed to identify, analyze and compare paratextual themes across the two periods, an inductive approach to coding was adopted. Empowered by grounded theory, this approach "begins with the researchers 'immersing' themselves in the documents in order to identify the dimensions or themes that seem meaningful to the producers of each message" (Abrahamson, 1983, p. 286). The paratextual data imported to MAXqda was carefully read and coded sentence by sentence. Coding is a validated method for structuring, conceptualizing, and identifying themes in a dataset (Richards & Morse, 2013). Sentences discussing similar topics were assigned to similar codes. Different codes corresponding to different topics ranged from a focus on the characteristics of the source text to a reference to the target readers. By the end of the coding procedure, 34 descriptive codes (topics) were identified, which later were grouped together to make six more conceptual higher-level codes (themes). The main corpus of this study consists of 153 paratexts extracted from 175 translations published between 1953 and 2004. It is important to note that not all translations contain paratexts, and some translations contain more than one paratext, for example, a preface and a publisher's note. The main corpus was divided into two sub-corpora: the paratextual corpus of the pre-revolution era (69 paratexts) and the paratextual corpus of the post-revolution era (84 paratexts).

Results and Discussion

The following sections present the results of the thematic analysis of the paratextual corpus using the qualitative data analysis software MAXqda 2020. The content of the paratexts was qualitatively examined to identify the related themes and topics. The qualitative analysis is presented in quantifications to create a more vivid picture of the paratextual corpus.

6.1. Themes Identified in the Main Corpus

Table 1 presents the themes identified in the corpus along with the percentage each theme covered in the main corpus.

Table 1. Themes Coverage in the Main Corpus

Themes	Text segment coverage in the main corpus
Source Text Author	57.4%
Source Text	21.7%
Socio-political Concerns	9.9%
Translation and Publication	8.3%
Literature	4.9%
Readership	0.6%

Table 1 shows that 57.4% of the paratextual discourse of the study discussed topics related to the authors of the source texts. The text segments coded under this category discuss the ST authors' background, style, character, views, literary works, reputation, significance, inspiration, and influence. 21.7% of the main corpus is the discourse on source texts, discussing their theme, plot, reception, summary and significance. Socio-political concerns, covering 9.9% of the main corpus, discuss topics such as racism, capitalism, power, war, women, social reforms, and industrial development. Discourse on translation and publication encompasses 8.3% of the main corpus and discusses a wide range of topics, from the selection process of specific work for translation and the challenges a translator faces in the process

of translation to more general topics as views on the phenomenon of translation as a whole. Discourse on literature covers 4.9% of the main corpus and includes text segments discussing the two topics of American literature and general views on literature, language, and art. 'Readership' is the theme with the least coverage in the corpus (0.6 %). This category includes segments in which paratext writers make reference to target text readers by whether specifying the readership or asserting what is expected of the readers.

6.2. Diachronic Analysis of the Paratextual Content

Table 2 and Table 3 present the extent to which each topic category was discussed in the paratexts accompanying Persian translation of American literary works in each of the periods under the study.

Table 2. Theme coverage in pre-Revolution era

Themes	Text segment coverage in the main corpus
Source Text Author	59%
Source Text	19.20%
Translation and Publication	9.50%
Socio-political Concerns	7.50%
Literature	3.30%
Readership	0.90%

Table 3. Theme coverage in post-Revolution era

Themes	Text segment coverage in the main corpus
Source Text Author	50.30%
Source Text	24.20%
Socio-political Concerns	12.50%
Translation and Publication	7.10%
Literature	4.90%
Readership	0.50%

As illustrated in Table 2 and Table 3, every major theme discussed in the paratexts of the first period was also discussed in those of the second period.

However, a closer look at Table 2 and Table 3 indicates a significant difference between the themes of 'Socio-political Concerns' and 'Translation and Publication' across the two historical periods. In the paratextual corpus of the first period, after the dominant themes of 'Source Text Author' and 'Source Text', 'Translation and Publication' was identified to have more coverage. In contrast, in the paratextual corpus of the second period, the third position belonged to 'Socio-political Concerns'. This suggests that paratext writers in the years before the Revolution put more effort into discussing different aspects of translation by providing details about the translators, their views and motivations, the challenges they confronted, and the strategies they adopted, as well as what they went through in selection, translation and publication processes of their works. This is in line with the results of Gharehgozlou's (2018) study concerning an increase in social and political discourse and a decrease in the topic of translation in paratextual materials accompanying English translations of Persian literary works published between 1925 and 2015.

As paratextual content is read by the reading public, it can be assumed that paratext writers, often translators in the pre-Revolution era, put more effort into making translation and translators visible in public view. The reason may be traced back to the position of translation and translators in the years leading to the Revolution. In the pre-revolution era, the translation of modern American literature, partly because of Franklin Book Program launched in Iran in 1954 (Azarang, 2016), started to gain considerable popularity among Iranian translators who praised modern American literary works for their fresh look at society and the simple and familiar expression that influenced the readers (Taghizadeh, 2003). Iranian translators used translation as a means to introduce virtues and knowledge of developed nations to Iranians and to make Iranians acquainted with the great literary works. To accomplish this goal, translators first needed to establish their position by making references to the practice of translation in the paratexts.

However, in the years after the Revolution, the translators, assuming the established position of translation and translators in public view, found opportunities to use the paratexts as a site to discuss social, cultural, and political matters.

Analyzing the motivations of translators and publishers stated in the paratexts revealed that in the pre-revolution era, the number one motivation for selecting a book for translation was to introduce great literary works to Iranian readers. For example, in the preface to the translation of *The Good Earth* in 1957, Lorestani explained that his motivation for translation of the book was to familiarize Iranian readers with such a noble author as Pearl S. Buck and wished that his translation would pave the way for further Persian translations of her works. However, in the post-revolution era, the motivation for translation was not purely literary but sometimes political. For example, in the preface to the translation of *Malcolm X*, Keshavarz stated that his motivation was to tell Iranian readers how the so-called developed society (i.e. the US) is corrupted from within and is incapable of governing its own country. In the same book, the publisher expressed that his motivation was to inform the Iranian readers about how the black lives in the US, how they fight for freedom and justice, and also to diminish the effect of the propaganda used to show this country as a dream paradise.

It is noteworthy that post-revolution translation cannot be solely attributed to ideological motivations. Unlike Hebrew-Arabic translations that served merely ideological purposes and were not accepted as literary creations (Kayyal, 2004), paratextual analysis in this study revealed that most Iranian translators prioritize literary objectives when engaging in translation endeavors, irrespective of the political relation between the nations. This inclination is observable in the paratexts, wherein translators express their concern to create translations that possess literary merit in their own right.

The distribution of text segments assigned to the thematic code 'Socio-political Concern' in each period is demonstrated in Figure 1. It is illustrated that topics such as 'Racism' and 'Islam' were absent in the paratexts of the pre-revolution era and emerged in those of the second period. In the preface to the translation of *Malcolm X*, Keshavarz praised Islam as the path toward justice and human salvation. There are numerous examples of post-revolution paratexts that condemn racism. In the preface to the translation of *The Light in the Forest*, published in 1982, Sarmad criticized the long-established belief that colors determined the positions of people in the world society. Such references in praise of Islam and condemnation of racism are absent in the pre-revolution paratexts. This is in line with the results of Sayaheen's (2015) study, and his reports on the rise of particular ideological and theological stands in paratexts of English translations of Arabic works in the post-September 11 era. Since 'rule of Islam over the country' and 'eliminating discrimination' are regarded as two of the main goals of the Islamic Revolution (Vakili, 2019), it can be inferred that the emergence of paratextual topics of 'Islam' and 'Racism' in post-revolution era could be the result of the systemic ideological shifts in Iran.
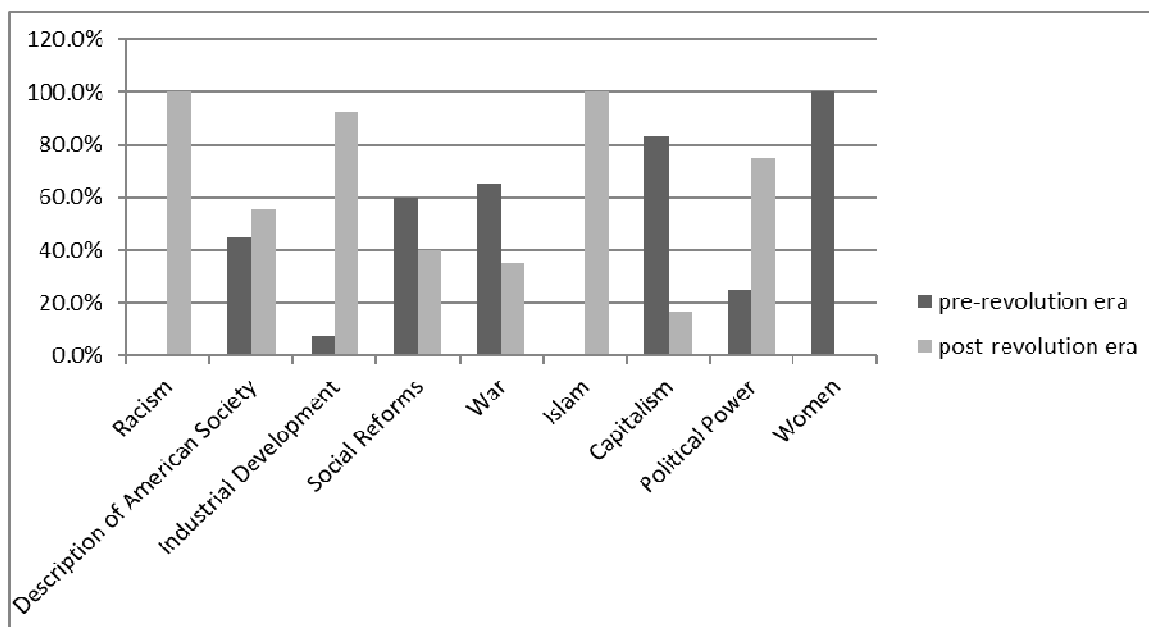

Figure 1.   Distribution of Text Segments Assigned to 'Socio-political Concerns' across the Two Periods

Instances of paratext writers describing American society in the pre-revolution era mainly emphasize positive aspects of the society. In the preface to the translation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* published in 1970, Golestan depicted the American society as a dynamic and forward-looking society, not restrained to old and cumbersome traditions. However, a few paratexts of the post-revolution era take a more pessimistic view on the American society, depicting US as a society of contradictions, injustice, and discrimination, which faces economic and ethical crises. In the preface to the translation of *The Pearl* published in 1981, Mehregan depicted the US as a country whose governors' only goal was accumulating wealth, plunder, looting of insiders and foreigners, and using violence.

The topic 'Women' concentrating on the potential role of women in society was only discussed in the paratexts of the pre-revolution era. In the preface to the translation of *The Scarlet Letter,* Daneshvar longed for a new woman to be the world's future prophet: a woman who is knowledgeable, reliable and worthy, who can change the rules wrongly imposed on women. However, the paratexts of the post-revolution era were empty of any references to women.

The prevalence of paratextual discourse on 'Social Reforms' in the pre-revolution era could be attributed to numerous reforms (as manifested in the White Revolution) introduced by the Shah of Iran in 1963, including land reform, granting suffrage to women, and free and compulsory education. Likewise, the prevalence of paratextual discourse on 'Industrial Development' in the post-revolution era could be attributed to the reconstruction and development programs of the Hashemi Rafsanjani administration and the following economic and industrial growth (Abrahamian, 2008). As a result, it can be inferred that the dominant discourses of society at specific historical points are reflected in paratexts surrounding translations. These trends can confirm D'hulst's (2010) belief in studying translation

to understand history, especially the history of cultural practices, including politics, language, and literature.

Conclusion

The present study aims at identifying any change in the presentation of Persian translations of American literary works published in Iran as manifested in the paratexts in two historical periods marked by the peaceful and hostile relationship between Iran and the US and the systemic ideological shifts in Iran. The result illustrated that the paratextual content in both periods encompassed similar themes. However, the extent to which each theme covered the paratextual content and the topics identified under each theme varied in the two historical periods. Diachronic analysis of paratextual discourse revealed a rise in socio-political concerns in the post-revolution era, while the discourse on translation decreased. Comparing the content of paratexts in the two periods revealed that the conflict between the two nations could influence the presentation of translated literature where paratexts were used to invoke anti-American sentiments in the post-revolution era. Moreover, analysis of the paratextual contents demonstrated that paratexts largely manifested the dominant discourses of the historical contexts in which they were produced.

The study implies that paratexts accompanying translations are politicized objects that not only reflect the cultural, social and political discourse within the field of literary translation but also are employed to shape ideological perceptions of the source culture in the target culture. The potential of paratexts accompanying translations in introducing and representing other states and cultures makes them venues for political and ideological plays during situations of peace or conflict between nations.

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