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Analysis of Stylistic Habits in Translation: A Narrative Account[1]

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Abstract

This study builds on a hypothesis proposed by Farahzad & Bolouri (2017) regarding the possible influence of linguistic habits on narrative (re)configuration through translation. It first interprets and clarifies the hypothesis using forensic stylistics and then outlines a methodology for examining stylistic habits in narrative construction. The hypothesis is subsequently tested through an empirical analysis of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* in Vida Eslamieh's Persian translation, the same translator examined by Farahzad & Bolouri (2017). The analysis compared the source and Persian texts to identify recurrent, non-deliberate optional lexical shifts, as indicators of stylistic habits. The findings tended to support the hypothesis. In the case examined here, as in Farahzad & Bolouri's (2017) study, the translator's seemingly habitual preference for religiously marked variants in rendering everyday expressions such as *I hope* and *I wish* appeared to have become automatic, suggesting a subtle reframing of the source-text narrative world. Although neutral forms also appeared, the frequency and recurrence of religious variants pointed to tendencies toward routinized stylistic behaviour that was likely to unconsciously influence patterns of selective appropriation and causal emplotment, allowing for a subtle reframing of a world governed by magic toward one increasingly oriented toward divine will. The study offers a refinement to Baker's narrative theory by showing that reframing may arise from linguistic habits as well as conscious ideologies.

Keywords: Forensic Stylistics, Linguistic Habits, Narrative, (Re)narration through Translation

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Introduction

Drawing on Baker's (2006) narrative approach and her notion of 'framing', Farahzad & Bolouri (2017) examined Vida Eslamieh's Persian translation of *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* to determine whether the ideological aspects of the original had been (re)framed.

Baker's (2006) narrative approach draws on the social-science concept of narrative, defined as "any set of events that can be arranged in a sequence and related" (Baker, 2006, pp. 9–10). Narratives help us make sense of experience and project specific pictures of the world. In this sense, narratives do not merely represent but construct reality (Harding, 2012, p. 287; Al-Herthani, 2009, p. 38–39; Al Sharif, 2009). They shape people's views of rationality, morality, and identity (Baker, 2006, p. 19; Somers 1992, p. 600). Narratives systematize experience by ordering events and guiding dispositions toward them (Baker, 2006, p. 10).

From this perspective, translation is a mode of (re)narration that constructs rather than merely reflects the source text (Baker, 2014, p. 159). Translators face an ethical choice: whether to reproduce or distance themselves from source ideologies (Baker, 2006, p. 105). Building on this, Baker (2006) introduces 'framing'- an active strategy through which translators highlight, downplay, or adjust elements to shape interpretation (p. 106). Framing may involve linguistic and paralinguistic choices, as well as paratextual interventions (Baker, 2006, p. 5; Baker, 2007). In this view, translators exercise agency and participate in ongoing processes of narration and renarration that construct reality (Baker, 2014, p. 159).

Farahzad & Bolouri (2017) used narrative and framing to examine whether *Harry Potter*'s controversial narratives were (re)framed in Persian translation. Since the late 1990s, the series provoked public debates, with critics claiming it promoted wizardry and irreligion. In Iran, the daily *Kayhan* described it as a Zionist project to influence young readers (p. 62). These controversies conflicted with dominant public narratives in Iran and prompted Farahzad & Bolouri's (2017) investigation. Their study analyzed both textual and paratextual sites of reframing. Within the text, lexical shifts were examined; around the text, the translator's interviews were reviewed.

The lexical analysis revealed numerous mismatches that produced a religiously inflected text (p. 57), repeatedly introducing references to God absent from the original (p. 65). This initially suggested deliberate reframing to align with public narratives (p. 67), but paratextual evidence emphasized the translator's commitment to fidelity (p. 67), casting doubt on intentionality. Moreover, several of her

spontaneous paratextual utterances echoed the same religiously inflected tone as the shifts, supporting the hypothesis that linguistic habits- rather than deliberate strategy- may have contributed to the religious coloring of the translation (p. 68).

This hypothesis provides the point of departure for the present study. Using forensic stylistics, it examines how translators' habitual linguistic choices may reconfigure narratives. The aim is to clarify how narrative construction is shaped not only by ideological frames but also by recurrent stylistic patterns. Forensic stylistics- which investigates unconscious linguistic traces of a writer's style- foregrounds the role of such habits in reframing the source text and deepening our understanding of translational (re)narration.

Interpretation of the Hypothesis in Terms of Forensic Stylistics

The lexical shifts identified by Farahzad & Bolouri (2017) resemble features discussed by Baker (2000) in her study of translator's style. Baker (2000) defines style as "the translator's characteristic use of language" or "recurring patterns of linguistic behavior" (Baker, 2000, pp. 245; see also Bosseaux, 2007). Such patterns form consistent choices that distinguish one translator work from another (Saldanha, 2005, p. 1; see also Mikhailov & Villikka, 2001).

The features highlighted by Baker (2000) align more closely with forensic stylistics, a field concerned with revealing unconscious and idiosyncratic linguistic patterns of a writer (Al-Batineh, 2019, p. 38). Such 'linguistic impressions' act like a 'signature', marking habitual traces (Coulthard, 2004; Leech & Short, 2007, p. 10). Unlike literary stylistics, which focuses on deliberate choices, forensic stylistics examines subtle linguistic habits largely beyond conscious control (Baker, 2000. P. 246).

Such tendencies reflect subconscious habits of regularly choosing one form over others, showing consistent statistical regularity (McMenamin, 2002, p. 127; 2010, p. 488; (Malmkjaer, 2003. p. 38; Winters, 2005). These styles develop along a continuum of awareness: shaped by social, cultural and ideological positioning, or by cognitive and environmental factors, they become automatic through repetition and part of a writer's 'individuality' (McMenamin, 2002, p. 126; see Baker, 2000, pp. 248, 258, 259; see also Olsson, 2008; Olohan, 2003). Even deliberate choices may, through repetition, be executed with reduced attention. What distinguishes habits is not awareness but intentionality: habits lack motivation, while deliberate

acts- such as censorship- remain intentional even if routinized. As Saldanha (2005) notes, the boundary between conscious and unconscious is unstable; recurrent patterns count as habits only when no conscious rationale exists (pp. 44, 46).

With this distinction, the present study focuses on observable manifestations of stylistic habits - cases where a translator consistently prefers one lexical, syntactic, cohesive, or punctuational option over another. Such recurrent preferences cannot alone be assumed to reflect stylistic habits, since they may simply reproduce properties of the source text. Distinguishing these possibilities requires examining the relationship between source and target texts.

The analysis must identify cases where the translator introduces a choice not required by the source text. These optional shifts - forms absent from the original but introduced in the translation despite available equivalents – provide the most reliable bases for identifying stylistic habits. Only through comparison can we determine whether recurrent preferences reflect the translator's style rather than features inherited from the source text.

This requirement exposes a limitation in earlier studies of translator style- such as Baker (2000) and Olohan (2003)- which focused mainly on target texts without systematic comparison to sources. Without such comparison, recurrent patterns may be wrongly attributed to the translator, though they may simply mirror the source author's preferences (Baker, 2000, p. 255; Saldanha, 2005, p. 2). To attribute any recurrent pattern to the translator, we must rule out source-text influence. Optional shifts therefore provide the most reliable basis for identifying stylistic habits.

Building on this understanding of translation as partly shaped by subconscious tendencies, the analysis turns to narrative implications of stylistic habits. A translator's idiolectal preferences - manifested through repeated optional shifts- may reshape the narrative logic of the source text (Munday, 1998, pp. 1–2). This perspective suggests that Baker's translational (re)narration is not always fully conscious: translators may subconsciously alter narratives due to idiolectal preferences. As Baker (2014, p. 159) notes, translators are embedded in circulating narratives while simultaneously contributing to their elaboration and transformation through translation choices (see also Baker, 2007, p. 156). Some of these choices may lie beyond conscious control, unintentionally reshaping narrative patterns of the source text.

To understand how subconscious stylistic tendencies contribute to narrative (re)configuration, two core features must be considered: selective appropriation and causal emplotment. Selective appropriation is the evaluative process through which

narrators foreground some aspects while downplaying or omitting others (Baker, 2010, p. 352; 2014, p. 167; 2016, p. 250). Because no narrative can include every detail, narrators highlight what they deem significant, guided by broader narrative environments (see also Al Sharif, 2009, p. 59).

Causal emplotment refers to the way narrators link events- through cause and effect, praise and blame, or responsibility, turning facts into intelligible sequences (Baker, 2014, p. 169; 2006, p. 67; Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). In translation, stylistic choices may unconsciously alter these patterns of selection and emplotment, unintentionally reshaping the narrative logic of the source text.

Methodology

Despite earlier attempts to examine stylistic habits in translational (re)narration (Farahzad & Bolouri, 2017), no comprehensive model has been developed that identifies recurrent translator choices and explores their impact on source-text narratives. Building on Farahzad & Bolouri (2017) and Baker (2000), the study proposes a framework for capturing stylistic preferences and extends Baker's narrative tools (2006) to investigate how such patterns contribute to narrative (re)configuration.

Stylistic habits are recurrent, non-deliberate choices manifested through optional shifts. Translators may subconsciously prefer particular lexical, syntactic, cohesive, or punctuational options where alternatives exist (see Baker, 2000, p. 248). Following Farahzad & Bolouri (2017), the methodology focuses exclusively on lexical items- the main carriers of meaning in a text (Biber et al., 2000; Bird et al., 2002; Anderson, 2018). These include verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, phrases, compounds, idioms, and similar forms, referring to people, places, objects, events, actions, attributes, concepts, and ideas (Biber et al., 2000; Richards & Schmidt, 2010; Smoliana, 2013; Munday, 2016; Boye, K. & Bastiaanse, R., 2018). Since narratives are typically expressed through lexical items (Baker, 2006), focusing on them allows examination of how subconscious habits may reshape narrative meaning.

Stylistic patterns are derived from a parallel corpus to ensure recurrent choices do not simply mirror source-text preferences. Consistent with Farahzad & Bolouri (2017), the corpus consists of a literary source text and its translation, aligning with Baker's (2000) formulation of translator style in literary translation.

In line with the definition of optional shifts, the analysis compares source and translation to identify all lexical choices not required by the source text. At this descriptive stage, all such instances are extracted and recorded as potential manifestations of stylistic habits.

After identifying optional lexical shifts, the next step is distinguishing deliberate interventions from habitual behavior. Paratextual material- interviews, and comments by editors or reviewers- helps determine whether any conscious rationale has been articulated for observed choices.

The methodology may also involve interviewing the translator, avoiding direct or leading questions about specific shifts. Because stylistic habits operate beyond awareness, explicit questions risks triggering post-hoc rationalizations. Open, non-directive prompts allow exploration of general translational approach without pushing toward conscious explanations.

The next stage is triangulation, which first examines whether a recurrent lexical pattern appears across the translator's other works, and second checks whether the same pattern is absent from another translation of the same source text (see Saldanha, 2005, p. 65). Third, triangulation conducts an intra-textual frequency check: for each item that recurs with a marked rendering in the translation, all occurrences of its source-text counterpart are examined to see whether the marked choice is used consistently or only sporadically. This step may be contextualized by checking how the same occurrences are rendered in another translation.

After triangulation, the analysis examines how habitual lexical patterns might reshape the narrative logic of the source text. Because selective appropriation and causal emplotment are interdependent, any shift in selection patterns necessarily alters emplotment patterns. Thus, when subconscious lexical habits change what is foregrounded or backgrounded in the translated narrative, the causal links through which events are made intelligible are also reconfigured.

An Empirical Analysis

At this stage, another Harry Potter volume was examined to explore stylistic habits in translational choices. The dataset was *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Rowling, 1999), and its Persian translation by Vida Eslamieh (2000). Since the Harry Potter series constitutes the translator's most significant works, selecting another volume provided an appropriate corpus for testing the hypothesis, and- given

that Farahzad & Bolouri (2017) focused on the second book, the present study turned to the next installment.

Source and target texts were aligned to identify lexical optional shifts – cases where the translator introduced a choice not required by the source text.

A total of 67 lexical optional shifts were identified. Of these, 30 cases seemed to have been motivated by censorship or ideological constraints, where the translator appeared to alter or remove elements to align with cultural or political norms. For example, "Alicia, Angelina, and Katie had all kissed Harry" (p. 262) was rendered as «آلیشیا، آنجلینا و کتی به او تبریک گفتند» (p. 316), back-translated as "Alicia, Angelina, and Katie congratulated him." These shifts typically involved sensitive domains such as alcohol, intimacy, or physical contact, which were replaced with neutral alternatives. In Iranian translation practice, such interventions are common and almost taken for granted. Although optional, their seemingly intentional nature meant they were excluded from stylistic-habit analysis.

The remaining 37 cases showed a religiously colored pattern, with additions and substitutions introducing a spiritual nuance absent from the original, and falling into three categories:

Religious intensification of minced oaths (9 instances).

This category includes mild English expletives- often semantically bleached- (e.g., Blimey; Oh my; Well goodness; Good even; for goodness' sake) rendered with explicit religious force in Persian (in all cases, the Persian rendering introduced the word God, producing forms equivalent to expressions such as For God's sake, My dear God, Thank God, God knows, and Great God).

English text (p. 223): "Nothing! **Blimey**, who'd spend that much on you?"

Persian translation (p. 272): «هیچی نیست. **وای خدا جون**، کی به خاطر تو این همه پول داده؟»

Back translation: "Nothing! Oh my God, who would spend that much money on you?"

Religious reframing of ordinary expressions (26 instances).

This category includes neutral English expressions (e.g., hope, wonder, wish, think, please- and inflected form such as hoping, hoped, hopes) translated

with religiously marked equivalents, preserving meaning while adding divine nuance (in all cases, the Persian rendering introduced the word God, producing forms equivalent to expressions such as praying to Gog, God knows, hope to God, swear to God and asking God).

English text (p. 55): "Harry **hoped** she never found out that he'd pretended to be Neville."

Persian translation (p. 72): «هری **خداخدا** می‌کرد مادربزرگ نویل هیچ‌وقت نفهمد که او خودش را نویل معرفی کرده است.»

Back translation: "Harry was **praying to God** that Neville's grandmother would never find out he had pretended to be Neville."

Religious additions (2 instances).

These cases introduced a religious element with no semantic or pragmatic basis in the source expression- typically functioning as an intensifier and enhancing the expressive or affective force of the passage.

English text (p. 424): "Don't go."

Persian translation (p. 482): «تو رو خدا همین‌جا بمونین.»

Back translation: "For God's sake, stay here."

These examples show that neutral expressions were systematically rendered with religiously marked equivalents, adding a spiritual nuance absent from the original. Given global controversies surrounding *Harry Potter*- often accused of promoting magic, irreligion, or the occult- such shifts might appear deliberate attempts to align with dominant public narratives. However, this interpretation becomes less convincing when viewed alongside Farahzad & Bolouri's (2017) findings. Their interviews and paratextual analysis show the translator consistently stressing fidelity, noting that even minor changes required approval from the author's representative and were limited to cultural attenuations- soft censorship (see p. 67).

In light of this evidence, the religiously inflected shifts are unlikely to be deliberate interventions; instead, they plausibly reflect the translator's stylistic tendencies, operating subconsciously and automatically. Consistent with methodology, these

cases are treated as non-intentional. To strengthen attribution to stylistic habits, the analysis applies triangulation across three paths: first, assessing whether the same categories of religiously inflected shifts appear in another Persian translation of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*; second, examining whether similar tendencies recur across Eslamieh's other translations; and third, conducting intra-textual frequency check on identified recurrent lexical items, as outlined in the methodology, to determine whether their recurrence is accidental or systematically produced.

Regarding the first path, the analysis examined whether the same categories of religiously inflected shifts found in Eslamieh's translation also appeared in another Persian version of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. For this purpose, Eslamieh's 2000 translation was compared with Arezoo Moghadas's 2022 version published by Porteghal. This Persian version was selected at random from available Persian translations of the novel by means of a Google search; the first translation retrieved was Moghadas's version. The choice therefore represented a convenience selection in terms of accessibility, while Porteghal appeared as a credible publisher among the available options. The two translations, produced over twenty years apart, may reflect different editorial climates and audience expectations influencing lexical choices. Such contextual factors may explain divergences between the translators' choices, and this temporal distance constitutes a methodological limitation.

Of the thirty-seven religiously marked shifts in Eslamieh's translation, only eight appeared with comparable coloring in Moghadas's version. In minced oaths, Eslamieh had nine instances, six reproduced by Moghadas with similar religious intensification, while the remaining three were translated neutrally. For example, "Oh, my" (p. 160), rendered by Eslamieh as «وای خدا جونم» (p. 197), back-translated as "Oh my God," appears in Moghadas's version as the neutral «ای وای» (p. 280), back-translated as "Oh dear."

In ordinary expressions, Eslamieh had twenty-six instances, only two rendered with comparable religious coloring in Moghadas's version, while the remaining cases

were neutral. For instance, "Harry hoped she never found out …" (p. 55) rendered by Eslamieh as «هری خداخدا می‌کرد ...» (p. 72), back-translated as "Harry was praying to God …," appears in Moghadas's version as «هری امیدوار بود» (p. 96), back-translated as "Harry hoped …."

In religious additions, Eslamieh had two instances, none reproduced in Moghadas's translation. For example, "Don't go" (p. 424), rendered by Eslamieh as «تو رو خدا همین‌جا بمونین» (p. 482), back-translated as "For God's sake, stay here," appears in Moghadas's version simply as «نرین» (p. 769), back-translated as "Don't go."

This comparison shows that both translators tended to add religious weight in minced oaths, though their choices do not fully overlap, suggesting a broader translational norm rather than a translator-specific tendency. In ordinary expressions, the difference is sharper: Eslamieh reframed twenty-six neutral items religiously, while Moghadas did so only twice. Persian allows both neutral and religiously colored variants ("I hope to God" vs "I hope"), but Moghadas used the religious forms only twice, whereas Eslamieh employed them twenty-six times, turning what is incidental in Moghadas's translation into a systematic pattern in Eslamieh's. In religious additions, none of Eslamieh's two cases appeared in Moghadas's version.

Taken together, these observations show that Eslamieh's translation systematically performs religious reframing, whereas Moghadas's version remains largely neutral. Given this indication that Eslamieh's reframing may reflect a stylistic tendency, the analysis moves to the next stage of triangulation. Before doing so, minced oaths are excluded because the overlap suggests a broader translational norm, and religious additions are excluded because the few instances are too limited to form a meaningful pattern. In ordinary expressions, Moghadas's two religious renderings- compared with twenty-four neutral ones- do not form a systematic pattern and instead reinforce the likelihood that this category reflects Eslamieh's stylistic habit. The analysis therefore concentrates on ordinary expressions and proceeds to the next triangulation stage.

Building on this focus on ordinary expressions, the analysis examined two additional works translated by Eslamieh to see whether the same stylistic tendencies recur across her broader oeuvre. The first was Agatha Christie's *Death in the Clouds* (1935), translated as «قتل در آسمان» and published by Milad in 1993. The exact English source edition used by the translator could not be verified. A line-by-line comparison with the modern HarperCollins EPUB (2008) showed close correspondence, yet the exact edition remains uncertain, constituting a methodological limitation. The second work was D. J. MacHale's *The Reality Bug* (2003)[3], translated as «ویروس واقعیت» and published by Ketab-saray-e Tandis in 2010. These texts were selected to test whether the tendencies found in the Harry Potter dataset persist across different authors, genres, and stages of Eslamieh's career.

In *Death in the clouds*, eight optional shifts were identified, all under ordinary expressions- the only category retained after excluding minced oaths and religious additions. For example, "I hope she hasn't brought that lap dog with her" (p.161) was rendered as «خدا کنه آن سگ لعنتی‌اش را نیاورده باشد» (p. 133; back-translated: I hope to God that she hasn't brought that damned dog).

In The Reality Bug, five similar shifts appeared, likewise in ordinary expressions; for instance, "the two of us stood there, both hoping" (p. 108) became «هر دو آن‌جا ایستاده بودیم و خداخدا می‌کردیم» (p. 441; back-translated: we both stood there and were praying to God).

The recurrence of these shifts across both texts suggests that the tendencies observed in the main dataset recur across different authors, genres, and stages of Eslamieh's career.

For the third triangulation path, as outlined in the methodology, the analysis conducted an intra-textual frequency check, which examines how the translator's marked renderings are distributed relative to all occurrences of the same items in the source text. Given the large number of recurrent items- and the limited scope of the

[3] All page numbers for The Reality Bug refer to the PDF edition used

article- attention was restricted to the most frequent item, namely *hope* and its inflected forms. Across thirty-five source-text occurrences, ten instances were rendered with religiously marked equivalents, while the remaining twenty-five were rendered neutrally.

These figures indicate that the translator uses both neutral and religiously marked Persian variants, but the fact that ten out of thirty-five occurrences were rendered with religious coloring suggests that these marked options are not incidental. To determine how far this pattern may reflect a stylistic habit rather than a general Persian tendency, the same thirty-five occurrences were examined in Moghadas's translation. Only three instances were rendered with religiously toned forms.

Taken together, these figures show that Eslamieh does not consistently rely on the religiously marked variant, but like any other Persian translator, alternates between religious and neutral forms. The examples suggest no fixed pattern governing her choices; she appears to decide contextually, selecting whichever variant sounds more idiomatic, fluent, or natural in Persian. Whenever the sentence requires additional force or emotional intensification, the religious variant tends to be used; otherwise, the neutral form feels sufficient. For instance, "I hope this finds you before you reach your aunt and uncle" (p. 432) was rendered neutrally as «امیدوارم پیش از رسیدن به خانهٔ خاله‌ات این نامه را دریافت کنی» (p.493–494; backtranslated as "I hope you receive this letter before reaching your aunt's house"), while "only hope Dumbledore's not going to make difficulties" (p. 416) became «فقط خدا کنه دامبلدور مشکلی به وجود نیاره» (p. 477; backtranslated as "Just hope to God that Dumbledore won't cause any trouble").

At the same time, Moghadas also occasionally uses religiously marked variants for apparently similar reasons. For example, "hoping no one had noticed" (p. 136) was rendered as «خداخدا می‌کرد کسی متوجه نشده باشد» (p. 237–238; backtranslated as "He was praying to God no one had noticed"). Yet, when the two translations are compared, Eslamieh use of religiously marked forms is far more frequent- ten out of thirty-five instances versus three out of thirty-five- suggesting that the religious variant has

become more routinized in her stylistic repertoire. Her repeated reliance on religiously marked forms indicates that these choices may have become automatic.

Such stylistic habits- whether arising from individual tendencies or broader linguistic patterns- form the basis for the final stage of the analysis, which examines how recurrent lexical shifts may reframe the source narrative. The focus here moves from isolated instances to their cumulative narrative effect, showing how these habits may help reconfigure source-text narratives. Drawing on Baker's narrative theory, the analysis explored how recurrent religious reframing- apparently subconscious and non-ideological- appeared to reshape patterns of selective appropriation and causal emplotment.

In the original *Harry Potter* world, magic is the central organizing principle and divine presence is absent. Characters consistently direct their hopes, fears, and expectations toward magical forces rather than any divine agency. By contrast, the Persian translation repeatedly inserts expressions such as "God willing", "Praying to God", "If God wills it" or "Hope to God", which collectively seem to redirect emotional energy toward God and help construct a translated universe in which divine presence becomes pervasive. This transformation appeared to alter patterns of selective appropriation: neutral expressions were replaced with religiously marked ones, foregrounding divine agency and pushing magical and supernatural agency into the background. Consequently, causal links originally grounded in magical logic were seemingly reinterpreted as manifestations of divine will.

Conclusion

Overall, narrative construction appears to be shaped not only by consciously drawn narratives but also by habitual linguistic choices that operate with little awareness and subtly connect to broader societal narratives. Such choices may slip into use without deliberate reflection and align the text with culturally resonant storylines, constituting subconscious framing that repositions the source narrative within a different interpretive frame.

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