

A Qualitative and Quantitative Inquiry into the Translation of English Fiction Titles into Persian¹

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Abstract

This paper sets out to study the translation procedures adopted by Iranian translators in rendering the titles of English fictions. The corpus comprised 300 titles of English translated fictions selected based on convenient sampling that was paralleled with their Persian counterparts. The books were published within the last three decades, and were authored by a wide range of English writers and have been translated by many Iranian translators. To obtain detailed and dependable results, the corpus was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The findings revealed that literal translation was the most frequent procedure followed by translators. Recreation, employment of related words, transliteration, reduction, adaptation, and addition were found as other translation procedures in the order of distribution. The frequency of recreation as the second procedure was the interesting result of the present study, in which translators opted for a completely new title irrelevant to the original title. Elaborating on the target text titles and the themes of their fictions in various procedures showed that almost all the changes applied to the original titles were consistent with the events of the stories or their final destiny.

Keywords: Procedure, Recreation, Titles

1. Introduction

The title, treated as a show window of a piece of work, is the first part that readers encounter, and contributes to an undeniable function in attracting potential readers. While Lodge considers titles as “a part of text,” Genette (1998) classifies them as paratexts that are located outside the text proper, but

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are essential to "its reception and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book" (p. 1). Entitling a piece of work is so significant that Farghal and Bazzi (2017) claim that two identical works with different titles create various expectations, and are interpreted differently by their readers. Viezzi (2013), in the same line, argues that any modification to the title challenges its final reception and perception.

Genette (1988) asserts that writers sometimes base their work on a single title from the beginning and then strive to justify it by adding material around it. On the other hand, Taha (2009) believes that a title should be a reflected picture of the book and its author's intention, and is adopted after accomplishing the whole work. Nonetheless, Genette admits that the first chosen title may be changed later under the pressure of the editor, or other influential factors. Consequently, the title of a work may not be the final choice of its author or translator. Adams (1987), in this regard, talks about a "true title" that is chosen by the author, not editors, publishers, or other patronages.

Genette (1988) introduces two kinds of titles: thematic and rhematic. The thematic title, mostly applied today, is a true reflection of the content or the object of the book, literally or ironically. The rhematic titles, on the other hand, are not widely applied, and mostly "display a sort of genre innovation" (p. 86). Thematic and rhematic titles are somehow connected to the content, form, or style of the work, and a combination of them may be used in a final title. The functions of titles have been the focus of various studies. Genette elaborates on an alluring function for the titles, which attracts potential readers to read the book.

Viezzi (2013) sheds light on three functions of "naming," "identifying" and "phatic" for titles, and in explaining each, argues that "every title is the name of a cultural product; every title informs about the existence of a cultural product bearing that name; every title establishes contact with the potential user"

(p. 375). In his words, although the fiction genre is more oriented toward attractive and popular titles, they may be entitled on a spectrum ranging from totally apparent to rather apparent and finally to enigmatic or figurative. The most profound connection of the title, in Taha's (2009) viewpoint, is forged with its possible reader. Consequently, the primary function of the title has to do with attracting the readers' attention that gives the most paramount significance to marketing and advertising as an overarching factor in the final choice of a title.

2. Title Translation

The subtle process of choosing or translating a title may contribute to (mis)understanding and (mis)interpretation of the whole book. Genette (1997) regards titles as the most problematic paratexts that invoke challenges in definition and call for meticulous analysis (p.55). Briffa and Caruana (2009, p. 2), likewise, refer to the tricky task of translating a novel's title because it is "governed by non-detachability" and drives "its identity from the context" (p. 2).

Several scholars have recommended some guidelines and procedures for the appropriate translation of titles. Nord (1995) offers a systematic approach to title studies in translation. She considers six functions for titles categorized into two groups: essential functions (distinctive, metatextual, and phatic) and optional functions (referential, expressive, and appellative). She emphasizes the significance of cultural elements, alongside the final purpose of translating titles.

Newmark (1988) introduces a more straightforward and more practical approach to title translation. He distinguishes between two types of titles: descriptive (reflecting on the topic of the text) and allusive (showing figurative or referential association with the topic). He talks about the possibility of replacing allusive titles with referential ones in favor of cultural understanding and idiomatic translation. He points out that, for the aim of identification, translated titles should bear some resemblance to the original, but finally, they should also be attractive to the target reader. From Newmark's point of view, literal

translation should not be ignored as much as it serves in rendering the source text unproblematically.

Kelan and Xiang (2006) argue that title selection should be based on target culture while also resembling the source language title's informative, aesthetic, and advertising functions. Applying completely new titles, in Viezzi's view (2013, p. 379), may be justified in terms of the content of the work and consideration of target culture readership. As Farghal and Bazzi (2017) put it, investigating the titles "is still a virgin ground that has not received due attention" (p. 120).

3. Review of Literature

Title translation has been investigated through the lens of various perspectives. Vilione (2011) worked on the do's and don'ts in the context of rendering novel titles. Her framework was based on Newmark's (1988) theory of titles, on the one hand, and Nida and Taber's (1974) theory of connotative meaning, on the other hand. She concludes that in translating novels, the whole text should be kept in mind alongside its connotative meaning and the possible response of its readers.

Translating titles mostly enjoys the most fidelity to the original authors' choice. In this respect, Newmark is of the view that if referential and pragmatic aspects of the source text title are preserved, literal translation can be followed. Farghal and Bazzi (2017) studied the translations of 100 titles of English bestsellers into Arabic. Literal translation, adaptation, employment of related words, paraphrase and transliterations were found as the procedures applied by translators in order of frequency. Regarding these procedures, they concluded, "paraphrase usually produces flat and wordy titles, whereas explication often offers better titles in terms of linguistic use and acceptability" (p. 133).

Zaymus (2020) worked on translation strategies applied to rendering titles of American novels into Hungarian. Based on Kinga Klaudy's and Eugene Nida's approach, she derived five main categories of direct translation, specification, generalization, omission, and total transformation. She concluded that in translating titles from American to Hungarian, "priority is attributed to the source language text as faithfully as possible, not only in its content but also in its form" (p.1).

In the Iranian context, Salehi and Fumani (2013) investigated title translations of one-hundred and twenty English novels into Persian based on the model of naming approaches proposed by Yin (2009) and functionalist skopos theory. The results elucidated literal translations as the most frequent approaches with various frequencies of three informative, aesthetic, and vocative functions among the titles. In another study, Hosseini (2013), in her MA thesis, explored a corpus of 500 English titles including films, novels, and animations in terms of Critical Discourse Analysis to find the patterns in lexical and grammatical choices in the rendering process into Persian. The results of her study depicted direct translation was the most frequent procedure, and it was also illuminated that two factors, genre and audience, may contribute to modifications in lexical and grammatical choices.

The present research aims to shed light on the titles of fictions translated from English to Persian. It benefits from a large sample of data and a quantitative and qualitative combination of study. Concerning the qualitative section, titles are studied along with the theme of the novel and translators' prefaces (to find any accounts on the modification of the titles).

4. Method

The translation of book titles between English and Persian has failed to achieve its deserved academic recognition. The present study sets out to explore

translators' procedures for translating the titles of English novels into Persian. Using a convenient sampling, 300 fictions from various authors and genres were selected. By fiction here, we mean novels, novelettes, and short stories that are based on imaginary and unreal events, made up by their authors (Abrams & Harpham, 2011). The corpus was published within the last three decades, starting from 1365–1395 (1986–2016) and was authored by a wide range of English writers and has been translated by many Iranian translators. The diversity of original works and translations could offer a more thorough knowledge of the various procedures applied.

Firstly, in the qualitative part, a data-driven approach was used for identifying translation procedures in which categories are chosen based on an in-depth analysis of all data using exploratory methods to obtain scientifically interesting insights (Kitchin, 2014). It contrasts with a theory-driven approach that is based on a predetermined classification of translation procedures. Extracted translation procedures were statistically analyzed to obtain their frequency and percentage in the corpus. In the next step, the translated titles were analyzed based on the fictions' theme and their translators' prefaces (if any) to uncover probable grounds for changes in the original titles. Finally, the quantitative part was supported with strong examples extracted from the corpus for a better understanding of the presented analysis.

5. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the corpus and its Persian counterparts yielded the distribution and frequency of seven types of translation procedures illustrated in the following table.

Table1. Procedures applied in translating titles

Translation procedures	Sum	Percent
literal translation	190	63.3
recreation	34	11.3

employment of related words	20	6.7
transliteration	16	5.3
reduction	14	4.7
adaptation	14	4.7
addition	12	4.0

5.1. *Literal Translation*

It was revealed that more than half of the titles (63.3%) were translated literally, which denotes strict fidelity of translators to the original authors and their choices. Newmark (1988, p. 46)-distinguishes literal translation from word-for-word or one-to-one translations that in both of them SL grammar and word order are transferred to the TL; but in literal translation, the nearest target equivalent is obtained both in terms of meaning and word order. Newmark believes that “literal translation is correct and must not be avoided if it secures referential and pragmatic equivalence to the original.” (p. 69). Viezzi (2013, p. 379), similarly, describes literal translation as “the accurate reformulation of the source title’s semantic content”. Some examples of literally translated titles are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Examples of literal translation in title translation

Source title	Translated title
The power of silence	قدرت سکوت
New moon	ماه نو
The hidden staircase	پلکان مخفی
Earthlight	نور زمین

5.2. *Transliteration*

As Majcher (2017) puts it, transliteration “is based on the principle of exact equivalence of graphemes—one grapheme of the alphabet of the source language has its equivalent in one grapheme of the alphabet of the target language” (p.135). Catford (1965, p. 68) introduces the transliteration system

as involving three steps: replacing a letter with a source language phonological unit, its translation into a target language phonological unit, and finally, converting the latter into a target language letter. Transliteration as a type of transference denotes the strict fidelity of translators to the source language because they are preserved in the target culture despite the temptation of substituting proper nouns that may sound unfamiliar and even unattractive to the readers. The application of transliteration is not restricted to proper nouns. It may be used, for example, for well-known fictions that are accepted and known among the target reader. For example, *Rain Man* has been transliterated into "رين من" because Iranian people are familiar with this name primarily through the well-known film that is made on this fiction.

In this study, sixteen (5.3%) titles were transliterated, and some of them are listed in the table below.

Table 3. Examples of transliterations in the translated titles

Source title	Translated title
Ben-Hur	بن هور
Absalom Absalom	آبشالوم آبشالوم
Henry James	هنری جیمز
David Copperfield	دیوید کاپر فیلد

5.3. Addition

Nida (1964) considers addition a necessary technique when translators are obliged to undertake some adjustments or modifications in the ST. Since translators are engaged with the whole novel, its characters and events, they may deem it necessary to clarify some implied materials in the titles by inserting some words into the original titles. In the present study, Agatha Christi's *The Big Four* is a detective fiction that revolves around some serial murders committed by four powerful characters: a Chinese, a French scientist, a rich American, and finally, a theater actor that is responsible for the murders. Applying addition technique, Sharifian translated this novel into "چهار قدرت بزرگ" to clarify these

"four ones" for the readers. Pars (1958/2005) similarly, in the translation of Conan Doyle's *The Crown of Diamond* adds the name of Sherlock Holmes to the title and changes it into "شرلوک هولمز و تاج الماس" to give some clues to his readers regarding the genre and author of the novel. Twelve titles (4%) were rendered using the addition process, and some other instances are shown in the table below.

Table 4. Examples of additions in the translated titles

Source title	Translated title
The road to Wigan pier	ژرفنا جاده‌ای بسوی اسکله میگان
The devil advocate	وکیل شیطان، راز یک قدیس
The diaries of Adam	خاطرات آدم و هوا
Catching fire	بازی‌های گرسنگی، آتش‌سوزی

5.4. Reduction

According to Nida and Taber (2003, p. 168), reductions are less common than expansions and, as a result, are structurally less significant. Anyway, applying proper reductions is of the same importance as employing appropriate expansions because both are associated with creating a natural and close equivalent in the TL. In the present study, 14 cases of reduction procedure were found among the translated titles. The rationale behind these reductions is not obvious, and the translators also provided no explanations in their prefaces or on the title page for their choice. Reduced titles in this study range from omitting the determiner in the title "those extraordinary twins" and reducing it into "دوقلوهای عجیب" to changing the structure of the title as a question in the title *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* into the more concise phrase of "ترس از تاریکی" in Persian. It seems that the reduced titles in the present study are consistent with preserving the basic tone of the original title. Nevertheless, the rationales behind some reduction procedures, like changing the title *the Rebel Church in Latin*

America into "کلیسای انقلابی" need more explanations. In the following table, some more examples of the reduced titles are presented:

Table 5. Examples of reductions in translated titles

Source title	Translated title
Death knocks	مرگ
Down and out in Paris and London	آس و پاس‌ها
The adventures of Tom Sawyer	تام سایر
The life and adventures of Nicholas Nickleby	نیکلاس نیکلیبی

5.5. Recreation

The interesting result was that 13.3% of translated titles had no relation to their original titles. The chain of events in the story, unpopularity of the original title in the TT or even the translators' personal preferences might be among the possible reasons for this discursive choice. This behavior may be more justified when the original title is mentioned at the beginning of the book or when translators justify these changes in their prefaces. Nonetheless, some scholars like Paul advocate these manipulations and believe that "literal translations are often a dreadful mistake when it comes to titles, and editors and translators must be prepared to be creative" (2009, p. 43).

In one example, Angali (1993/2015) translated Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* into "عطش انتقام". This novel revolves around a relatively disgraceful man murdered, and a few days later, another murder occurs that invokes the first cooperation between Sherlock Holmes and his assistant that are supposed to find the connection between them. This fiction has been translated in Iran under other names such as "اتاق مطالعهای به رنگ سرخ", "اتود در قرمز لاکمی", and "اتاق" "سرخ" that are more associated with the original title. Angali, in his preface, justifies his totally new title:

Finding an appropriate yet identical equivalent for the title *A Study in Scarlet* was of difficulty in Persian. "زیبایی از" or "رحمت بی‌پاداش" "درون زشتی" could be suggested. But, regarding the process of events in

the story and their final result, I chose “عطش انتقام” because it was a more expressive and eloquent choice (p. 7).

Alipour, in another example, substitutes Malamud’s *The Fixer* with the irrelevant title “فريب خوردگان بزرگ” in Persian. Interestingly, no trace of the original title or its total change is found in the title page or the translator’s preface. The book is concerned with a Jewish who lives among Russian Christians and hides his religion. He is accused of murdering a Christian boy, while at the same time, his Judaism becomes evident for the people. This case turns into a ground for religious revenge and suppressing the Jewish community. It seems a safe claim that Alipour’s choice in the Persian language is resulted from the overall theme of the novel, and it is perhaps addressed to the Christian community in the fiction that has been deceived by a seemingly religious foe.

Parvaneh’s translation of Emily Brontë’s *wuthering heights* into “عشق هرگز نمی میرد” is another case of a recreated title from English into Persian. This novel has been translated into Persian several times under the well-known title “بلندی های بادگیر” that may make this new title unjustifiable for the readers. The theme of this book is associated with a passionate but problematic love between Catherine and Heathcliff, a foundling adopted by Catherine’s father; that eventually leads to Catherine’s death and Heathcliff’s suicide. Like the examples mentioned above, in this case, no justification remains for changing the source text title except the storyline and its ultimate fate. Some more examples of titles that were recreated are presented in the following table:

Table 6. Examples of recreated titles

Source title	Translated title
To a God unknown	سر بلند
Five little pigs	تصویر تلخ یک نقاش
Jonathan Livingston seagull	درس های آزادی
Windmills of the Gods	سفیر

5.6. Employment of Related Words

In this study, twenty cases of titles were translated into their related words. This procedure is taken from Fraghal and Bazzi's (2017) research that "can be effectively used to relay the most important aspect of a title in the absence of appropriate one-to-one correspondence" (p. 129). It embraces synonymous and hyperonymy-hyponymy associations that exist among various words. The novel *Vanished* by Danielle Steel is translated into the related word "گمشده" in Persian. It revolves around the story of Marielle Patterson and her husband Malcolm, who are faced with the almost incredible tragedy of kidnapping their little boy. Marielle has kept hidden her previous marriage from her husband, and when their son vanishes, her ex-husband is the first one who is blamed and arrested. About one-fourth of the story is concerned with the child's disappearance and the struggle to find him. It seems that the literal equivalent of *vanished* which is "ناپدید شده" in Persian, is more eloquent and relevant to the chain of events in the story. When something is vanished, it disappears, especially in a sudden and surprising way that evokes the mysterious feeling of being abducted, but the Persian title "گمشده" that means "missing" mainly denotes "not being in the usual place" and is not necessarily interwoven with an enigmatic event. In another example, Clancy and Greenburg's fiction, *Ruthless.com*, is translated into related words of "شبکه‌ای بی‌رحم" in Persian. ".com" is a suffix attached to the end of a website's name that conveys the type of organization the site is linked to. The story has to do with encryption technology responsible for keeping the world security and communication systems top secret. This technology is abused by the wrong people and jeopardizes national and world security. Concerning the cryptic and secretive nature of the fiction, the original title, "*Ruthless.com*," may be more appropriate stylistically. Nonetheless, the translator decided to change the source text title into a related and more straightforward title for the target readers. Table 7 presents some more examples of titles translated based on this procedure:

Table 7. Examples of employment of related words in translated titles

Source title	Translated title
The A.B.C murders	الفا و جنايت
Scorpio rising	بازگشت عقرب
Our game	ترفند ما
The moonstone	ماه الماس

5.7. Adaptation

As Munday puts it, the adaptation procedure is consistent with free translation where the form and the sense are discarded in the target language (2008). The degree of departure from the source text is not specified in this procedure, and as Dickins & Higgins (2002, p. 17) state, "the degrees of freedom are infinitely variable". As an example of this procedure, Montazeri (1976/2006) translated The Moving Finger novel by Agatha Christie into "انگشت اتهام" that made it more adapted to the target reader, and at the same time, preserved the spirit of the original title. The Burtons, a brother and sister who arrive in a village to reside, are the subject of the fiction. After a short while, they receive a letter from an anonymous person that accused them of an immoral act. These kinds of letters containing false accusations are sent to many residents of the village, leading to the suicide of the solicitor's wife. After the failure of the police to find the murderer, in the final quarter of the story, Miss Marple shows up to contribute to solving the riddle. Hence, it becomes obvious that Montazeri's choice of "انگشت اتهام" is completely consistent with the book's theme, and relates to the murderer's finger pointing at various people in the community for corruption they haven't done. On the other hand, this title seems influential in introducing the detective genre of the story.

Alipour's translation of Betsy Cromer's The TV Kid into "شيفتهى تلويزيون" is another case of adaptation in the line of making the original title more expressive for the target reader. The TV kid is supposed to elucidate the negative

effect of television on children. Leny, the main character of the fiction, is excessively preoccupied with watching TV programs, and tries to create a connection between his real world and the unreal world of the TV built in his mind. Having faced some imaginary wanderings, he concluded that these programs have nothing to do with his real life. Finally, he turns off the TV and tries to adjust himself to reality. Focusing on the overall theme, it is a safe claim to conclude that the translator has found "شیفته‌ی تلویزیون" more adequate and popular for the Iranian readers. Fourteen titles in the present study were adapted, and some of them are illustrated in the following table.

Table 8. Examples of adaptations in translated titles

Source title	Translated title
<i>Dangling man</i>	انسان سرگشته
<i>Moving spirit</i>	روح سرگردان
<i>The catcher in the rye</i>	ناطور دشت
<i>The wind done gone</i>	بر باد می‌رود

Concerning the analysis of prefaces, out of 300 fictions under the study, 97 cases were found with translators' prefaces. They were examined in terms of accounts on title translation. Only 7 prefaces were discovered with explanations of changes made in source text titles, despite the fact that more than a third of the titles were translated using processes other than literal translation, and 34 of them had no association with their originals.

6. Conclusion

The parallel of source text titles with their Persian equivalents yielded various procedures for translating fiction titles. Literal translation, as the most frequent procedure, reflected the fidelity of Iranian translators to the original fictions and their authors' choice. In this case, translators probably found English titles appropriate for the Persian readers without comprehension and cultural obstacles. This behavior is consistent with Newmark's (1988) viewpoint on

descriptive titles that “if the SL text title (original title) adequately describes the content, and is brief, then leave it.” Marti and Zapter (1993), similarly, believe that a “faithful, literal translation is preferable if it works in the target language, that is, if it is as shocking or conveys the same connotations as the original title. But this is not always possible” (p. 81). Literal translation, as the most frequent translation procedure, was also found in some other studies (Farghal & Bazzi (2017), Hosseni (2013), and Salehi & Fumani (2013)), although they explored the title translation from various perspectives.

Another rationale behind following the originals may be the significance of titles in introducing the whole book or its author. Manipulating a pre-existed title and providing a new or different title for a fiction may put the translators in the controversial position of betrayal and untruthfulness to the original author. In the present study, recreation was interestingly found as the second procedure, in which translators opt for a completely new title in the target language. Two possible reasons may explain this manipulation. Firstly, it may be the personal choice of translators based on the theme of the fiction or cultural comprehension. In this respect, Viezzi (2013, p. 379) advocates changes made to original titles based on the content of the work and consideration of target culture readership. In this respect, the finding of the present article is compatible with Violine’s (2011) study that found the “response of the target readers” and “keeping in mind the whole text” as the main criteria for translating novel titles.

Secondly, the recreated titles may be imposed on the translators by other influential factors and agents, such as the publishers. As Lodge (2011) argues, novels “have always been commodities as well as works of art, and commercial considerations can affect titles, or cause them to be changed” (p. 195). Examining the titles rendered in various procedures alongside the themes of the fictions revealed that almost all the procedures applied are consistent and somehow associated with the storylines. In spite of finding “recreation” as the second procedure, accounts on title translation were scarce in the translators’ prefaces. According to Dimitriu (2009), the alignment of translators’ prefaces

with translations is useful and valuable for translation research in uncovering translation standards and ideals.

With respect to the significance given to titles as thresholds for approaching a piece of work (Farghal & Bazzi, 2017 and Genette, 1997), providing explanations regarding extensive changes in the original titles on the title page or translators' prefaces is deemed necessary. The current study's concentration on the English language and fiction genre may limit its applicability. As a result, investigating translation procedures of titles in a variety of languages and genres could yield intriguing results.

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آمنه یاری^۲

چکیده

این مطالعه در صدد بررسی رویکردهای به‌کار رفته مترجمان ایرانی در ترجمه رمان‌های انگلیسی به فارسی می‌باشد. مجموعه داده‌ها شامل ۳۰۰ عنوان رمان ترجمه شده بود که بر اساس نمونه‌گیری در دسترس انتخاب شدند. کتاب‌ها در سه دهه اخیر چاپ شده و توسط نویسندگان و مترجمان مختلفی نگاشته و ترجمه شده بودند. برای رسیدن به نتایج جامع‌تر و قابل اعتمادتر، داده‌ها به‌طور کمی و کیفی مورد بررسی قرار گرفتند. نتایج نشان داد که ترجمه تحت‌اللفظی بالاترین فراوانی را در میان رویکردهای به‌کار رفته مترجمان داشت. بازآفرینی، کاربرد واژگان مرتبط، حرف‌نگاری، کاهش، اقتباس و افزایش به ترتیب در جایگاه‌های بعدی قرار گرفتند. فراوانی رویکرد بازآفرینی در جایگاه دوم نتیجه جالب‌توجه این مطالعه بود که در آن مترجمان عنوانی کاملاً جدید را اختیار کرده که هیچ ارتباطی با عنوان مبدأ نداشت. بررسی عناوین ترجمه‌شده و موضوع رمان‌ها نشان داد که تغییرهای صورت گرفته در راستای وقایع داستان‌ها و یا سرنوشت نهائی آن‌ها بوده است.

واژه‌های راهنما: بازآفرینی، رویکرد، عنوان

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