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**A Comparative Study of Dubbing and Subtitling Norms in  
Translating Taboos in Movies from English into Persian**

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# **In The Name of the Almighty God**

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## **Abstract**

Taboos are believed to be treated differently in dubbing as opposed to subtitling. In the present study, it was attempted to investigate the strategies employed in translating taboos in dubbing and subtitling separately and then to compare these strategies used in each of the two techniques. The study was comprised of 2 questions and one hypothesis. The theoretical framework adopted was Gottlieb's strategies suggested for subtitling which were also applied to translating taboos in dubbing as well as subtitling in the present study. Having analyzed the data, the researcher reached the conclusion that the strategies were not equally applied in dubbing as opposed to subtitling; and that each of them had been applied to a different extent. The researcher also found out that the translators had utilized 2 more strategies in order to make up for the loss of information generated as a result of translating the taboo terms.

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# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

## 1.0 Introduction

Perhaps it is not too far-fetched a statement to say that most of us like to think of ourselves as (more or less) rational, articulate and disciplined human beings. Having postulated this, it should be added that we are not always quite as rational, articulate and disciplined as we might wish to be since we are, like it or not, also emotional, sensual and aggressive beings. Since both speech and emotions are universal features of the human species across space and time, so is swearing (Ardo 2001).

So taboo is part of our everyday lives and movies are not an exception to this. As we are exposed to movies of all kinds, we notice lots of curses, swear words, sexual terms, cultural humors, etc which are forbidden in some other cultures.

Some instances of taboos are provided by Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia (retrieved in October 2009). They include “dietary restrictions” ([halal](#) and [kosher](#) diets, religious [vegetarianism](#), and the prohibition of [cannibalism](#)), “restrictions on [sexual activities](#) and [relationships](#)” “restrictions of bodily functions” ,“[exposure of body parts](#)” (ankles in the [Victorian British Empire](#), women's hair in parts of the [Middle East](#), [nudity](#) in the [US](#)), and “restrictions on the use of [offensive language](#)”.

Dubbing and subtitling are two common techniques for localizing the foreign movies and making them understandable for the common watchers, so they must be reliable in such a way that all the details of the original copy are completely transferred to the foreign watchers of the film. But there is a concept called censorship which makes the exact and complete translation of movies impossible. One of the things which are subject to censorship is 'Taboo'.

Sometimes some movies are so verbally censored (in dubbing and subtitling) either through deletion of taboos or by radically changing them that the result is totally different from what the original copy is. Sometimes even the type of relationship of the movie characters is altered in translation.

Dubbing and subtitling have long history in Iran. The first movie being dubbed in Iran dates back to 1946 (name of the movie: forgive me) and the first one being subtitled dates back to 1990 or something. There have been many changes and improvements in the related equipments and also strategies employed in translating them.

Depending on its beliefs, religion, policy and the level of freedom, each society has different levels of censoring taboos in the translation of movies through dubbing or subtitling. Anyway the level of censoring taboos varies from dubbing to subtitling.

## **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

As stated above, taboos are believed to be treated differently in dubbing vs. subtitling. In the present study, there is going to be an attempt to investigate the strategies used in translating taboos, dubbing and subtitling separately and then to compare these strategies in the two techniques.

## **1.2 Significance of the Study**

There have been many studies in the area of audiovisual translation and also translation of taboos in dubbing or subtitling but it seems that no comparative investigation has been done in this regard. This study may be the first one comparing the concept of taboo and its translation in dubbing vs. subtitling and seeking the reason for such a difference. Thus the result will hopefully draw the attention of more addressees in so far as it is related to dubbing and subtitling.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

The questions which are sought to be answered in this study are:

1. What are the most frequently used strategies in translating taboos in dubbing vs. subtitling in the English movies translated into Persian, according to the strategies suggested by Gottlieb?
2. Are the strategies used in censoring taboos in Iran more frequent and strict in dubbing than in subtitling?

## **1.4 Research Hypothesis**

The related hypothesis is as follows:

1. Taboos are more widely censored in dubbing than in subtitling.

## **1.5 Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework used in this study included the strategies suggested by Gottlieb for subtitling. Gottlieb (1992; cited in Poursoltani: 2008) has suggested 10 strategies to be widely used in subtitling. These strategies are as follows:

- (1) Expansion: is used when the original text requires an explanation because of some cultural nuance not retrievable in the target language.

*Expanded expression, adequate rendering (culture-specific references etc.)*

- (2) Paraphrase: is resorted to in cases where the phraseology of the original cannot be reconstructed in the same syntactic way in the target language.

*Altered expression, adequate rendering (non-visualized language-specific phenomena)*

- (3) Transfer: refers to the strategy of translating the source text completely and accurately.

*Full expression, adequate rendering ('neutral' discourse – slow tempo)*

- (4) Imitation: maintains even the same forms, typically with names of people and places.

*Identical expression, Equivalent rendering (proper nouns, international greetings etc.)*

- (5) Transcription: is used in those cases where a term is unusual even in the source text, for example the use of a third language or nonsense language.

*Anomalous expression, adequate rendering (nonstandard speech etc.)*

- (6) Dislocation: is adopted when the original employs some sort of special effect,

for example a silly song in a cartoon film, where the translation of the effect is more important than the content.

*Different expression, adjusted content (musical or visualized language-specific phenomena)*

- (7) Condensation: refers to the shortening of the text in the least obtrusive way possible.

*Condensed expression, concise rendering (normal speech)*

- (8) Decimation: is an extreme form of condensation where, perhaps for reasons of discourse speed, even potentially important elements are omitted.

*Abridged expression, reduced content (fast speech of some importance)*

- (9) Deletion: refers to the total elimination of parts of a text.

*Omitted expression, no verbal content (fast speech).*

- (10) Resignation: describes the strategy adopted when no translation solution can be found and meaning is inevitably lost.

*Differing expression, distorted content ('untranslatable' elements)*

Although these strategies were suggested for subtitling, some of them could be generalized for dubbing, as well which may include: Condensation, decimation, deletion and resignation.

## **1.6 Definition of Key Terms**

**1.6.1. Audiovisual Translation:** "Audiovisual translation is what can also be referred to as screen translation or film translation. The term screen translation emphasizes the locative of the medium/carrier where the translation product appears, namely the TV, cinema or video screen. In the same sense, the translation of websites seen on computer monitors could also be considered as screen translation. Nevertheless translation for computer monitors is not regarded as screen translation, unless the text (written or spoken) accompanies moving images with built-in sounds. From these two terms, Karamitroqlu prefers audiovisual translation because it emphasizes the audiovisual dimensions of the communicative mode" (Karamitroqlu 2000: 1; cited in Saadati 2009:13).

**1.6.2. Subtitle:** Subtitles, also referred to as captions, are translation of the spoken (or written) source text of the original into a written target text which is added to the image of the original product usually at the bottom of the screen (Gottlieb 1998: 247; Luyken et al. Delabastita 1989: 200 cited in karamitroglou 2000: 5).



It should be noted that subtitles are different from **displays** or **captions**. "Displays" are fragments of text recorded by the camera – letters, newspapers, headlines, banners, etc."(Gottlieb 1994a: 107; cited in Karamitroglou 2000: 5) "Captions" (or top-titles) are pieces of textual information usually inserted by the program maker to identify the names, places or dates relevant to the story line (Luyken et al. 1991: 31; cf. Gottlieb 1994a: 107, cited in karamitroglou 2000: 5).

**1.6.3. Dubbing:** An AVT method in which the foreign language dialogue is synchronized to the lip movements of the original utterances

**1.6.4. Taboo:** Up to the present time, there has been numerous definitions offered for taboo, however as mentioned by Abdi (2007), it refers to eating certain foods, sex, drinking alcohol, swearing, bad language, curses, vulgarisms, incent, blasphemy, open men-women interactions, political opposition, body functions and defects.

**1.6.5. Censorship:** The act of omitting some scenes or utterances from the text (which can be a movie, a book, an article, etc.)

## **1.7 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

As mentioned earlier, this study was involved with some movies as the corpus, and the main characteristic of the movies was their existence in both dubbed and subtitled versions. Dubbing in Iran has better quality than subtitling, since subtitling is done in underground institutions, not having the working certificate, thus lacking the required supervision over their translation. So finding subtitled versions of the movies with the accepted quality was a cumbersome task.

This study is on the other hand limited to studying verbal taboos, excluding visual ones.

# **Chapter Two**

## **Review of the Literature**

## 2.0 Introduction

In the beginning of this chapter, various definitions of “audiovisual translation” and its two major methods, i.e. “dubbing” and “subtitling” are reviewed. Besides, the advantages and disadvantages of the aforementioned methods are investigated. The second half of this chapter is devoted to “taboo”, “censorship” and its various types. The reader also becomes acquainted with a short history of censorship in Iran. Finally, the age-old practice of censorship in audiovisual translation is briefly studied.

### 2.1. Audiovisual Translation

In her thesis on audiovisual translation, Baumgarten (2005) celebrates the widespread popularity achieved by film translation as follows:

*“Film is a mass medium and translated films are the only kind of translations which are received by a mass audience. A film text has an unparalleled number of recipients because film has at the moment five channels of distribution: cinema, television, video, DVD and internet. Furthermore, in the case of cinema releases and television broadcasts, a large audience receives a particular film practically at the same time. That is to say, the content of a film can easily enter public discourse because it is likely that a large number of people share the information.” (p. 19)*