

## Translatability of Postmodern Features: A Study of Donald Barthelme's Short Stories in Persian Translation

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### Abstract

Postmodern literature possesses distinct characteristics that are evident in both its content and form. This research first attempts to identify the postmodern features in a corpus of English postmodern literature and examines their possible translatability across linguistic and cultural barriers. To this end, a corpus of ten English postmodern short stories by Donald Barthelme along with their corresponding translations into Persian was developed. Drawing on the integrative model of analysis developed for this study, the postmodern features in English stories were identified and their corresponding translations were analyzed at various levels. The results of the study indicate a high degree of translatability for postmodern features, as they experienced minimal transformation during the translation process. In fact, the translated stories remained remarkably postmodern, with the preservation of these features to a significant extent. However, it is important to exercise caution when interpreting this high degree of translatability. While translators may consciously strive to maintain these features, it is also possible that postmodern elements, which are predominantly manifested beyond sentence-level structures, may go unnoticed or remain untouched by translators. Additionally, the preservation of postmodern features in translation could be a result of translators' reluctance to intrude upon the creative process.

Keywords: Postmodern Features, Donald Barthelme, Translatability, Postmodern Literature

### Introduction

Postmodern literary works possess distinct and unconventional qualities that necessitate specialized translation skills. These attributes are typically ingrained within the work's content, although they also manifest in its form. Despite the fact that this literary genre is translated into Persian from various languages, including English, Italian, French, and German, the examination of the translation of these works remains an underexplored area in the field of translation studies. It can be argued that the recent emergence of postmodernism as a literary movement, the relatively limited number of postmodern literary works translated into Persian compared to other genres, and the inherent

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challenges in comprehending and analyzing these works contribute to the lack of research in this particular domain.

A survey of existing literature indicates that numerous studies have centered on analyzing the content and formal attributes of Persian and English postmodern short stories. However, the translation of these works and the alterations they undergo during the translation process remain unexplored. Consequently, the primary objective of this research is to scrutinize the postmodern elements found in Donald Barthelme's short stories once they have been translated and undergone the transition from English language and culture to Persian.

## Background

Postmodernism, arising from the prefix "post," can be regarded as a literary stage or movement that emerged after modernism (Ebbesen, 2006, p. 1). In simpler terms, postmodernism signifies a departure from modernism. However, some thinkers view this transition as a rupture from modernism, while others perceive it as a continuation and extension of modernism (Manion, 2001, p. 251). Consequently, there is no singular theory that universally defines or encompasses postmodernism. Theorists have presented diverse and even conflicting perspectives, reflecting the very plurality championed by postmodernism. Amidst this diversity, two major perspectives on postmodernism can be discerned. The first perspective conceptualizes postmodernism as a historical period following modernism, while the second perspective understands it as a literary and artistic style that encompasses a range of creative tools and approaches (Payandeh, 2011, p. 27). According to the first viewpoint, modernism revolves around enlightenment, reason, and the cohesive, self-aware, and intellectual individual. By relying on reason, individuals can attain truth and pursue progress and happiness. However, in the postmodern era, reality becomes an unstable and transient concept, and the proliferation of imagery, replicas, and simulations hinders the quest for a unified truth (Klages, 2006, pp. 170-172). The present study focuses on the second perspective, specifically postmodern literature. Extensive research and publications have examined the themes and characteristics of postmodern literature. Payandeh (2011) has examined various exemplary Iranian postmodern stories from different perspectives, including the theories of Lyotard, Baudrillard, McHale, Foucault, Hatch, and White. The analysis also explores the themes of Persian postmodern literature and the techniques employed by authors in crafting postmodern short stories.

Donald Barthelme, an American author, is recognized as a prominent figure in the realm of postmodern literature. His works exhibit a profound sense of skepticism and are infused with humor. Notably, Barthelme's stories deviate from traditional narrative structures, often building up to a climax through a series of events and then concluding in surprising and unconventional ways. This unconventional approach is marked by fragmented and nonlinear storytelling, a collage-like composition, and the incorporation of numerous details that may initially seem unrelated (Brooker, 1996; Lewis, 2001).

Numerous scholars have directed their attention towards the literary works of Barthelme, conducting analyses that encompass aspects such as style, content, and postmodern characteristics. Some researchers have drawn comparisons between Barthelme's works and those of other esteemed writers such as Barth, Nabokov, and Pynchon (Rother, 1976). In another study, Barthelme was evaluated alongside both postmodern and non-postmodern authors (Olsen, 1998). Maltby (1991), after examining the works of Barthelme and Coover, arrived at the conclusion that these writers utilize language as a political and social instrument. Sierra (2013) also explored the presence of collage and allusions in Barthelme's stories. A review of existing literature reveals that certain stories by Barthelme have garnered more attention from researchers than others. For example, the novel *Snow White* has been extensively analyzed from various perspectives (e.g., Sloboda, 1997). The interplay between post-

capitalism and consumerism, on one hand, and language and structure, on the other, constituted the focus of Dini's investigation of *Snow White* (Dini, 2016). Another study examined the aesthetic, gender, and humorous elements within *Snow White* (Nealon, 2005). Berman (1991) analyzed the role of gender in characterization, the prevalence of male discourse, and the portrayal of female characters in Barthelme's stories. Furthermore, Zeitlin (1993) explored the content of Barthelme's works from a post-Freudian perspective. Mohammadi et al. (2012) examined the Derridean concept of *différance* in two Barthelme stories, demonstrating the transformative power of linguistic play. In another study, Lord (1987) initially analyzed the overarching postmodern features in Barthelme's stories before delving into the philosophical concepts present across several narratives. Barthelme's stories have also been approached from a nihilistic standpoint. Lord (1987) concludes that although Barthelme's stories exhibit nihilistic tendencies by ridiculing human endeavors to grasp truth and meaning, the author cannot be solely classified as a nihilistic writer, as some of his stories display no traces of nihilism.

In addition to exploring postmodernism and postmodern literature, the concept of translatability is important in the current study. The concept of translatability has far-reaching implications for translation decisions, both in practical challenges and theoretical discussions of translation. It can also surface in philosophical and epistemological debates surrounding translation (Pym & Turk, 2001, p. 273). Therefore, reaching a consensus on the binary definition of translatability and untranslatability is a challenging and potentially unattainable task. Instead, what emerges from this dichotomy is a lengthy list of diverse conditions that impact specific translations. In other words, the concept of translatability may focus on either the source text or the target text, may arise in discussions on translation of literary, cultural, referential, or pragmatic texts, or be invoked in relation to an entire culture and society (Pym & Turk, 2001, p. 273).

Translatability can be approached from three broad perspectives. The first perspective regards meaning and structure as universally translatable across different languages, viewing the relationship between thought and language as tenuous. The second perspective posits an inseparable connection between thought and language, rendering every translation an attempt at an impossible task. The third perspective, while acknowledging the unique characteristics of each language, maintains that the translation of written texts into any language is achievable (Hermans, 2009, p. 300; Pym & Turk, 2001, pp. 273-274). Translatability, as operationally defined in this study, is the capacity to transfer form, structure, and content from one language to another, provided that no substantial alterations are made. In simpler terms, if the features, structure, content, or form of the source text are "present" in the target text without undergoing noticeable changes, we consider them as examples of translatability (Pym & Turk, 2001, p. 273).

## Method

In order to investigate the translatability of elements associated with postmodern fiction, a corpus consisting of 10 English stories by Donald Barthelme, one of the contemporary American postmodern writers, along with their 10 corresponding Persian translations was developed. To select the stories, first a list of Barthelme's short stories that were translated into Persian was prepared. Then, from this collection, the stories that were considered postmodern by literary critics (see for instance Lewis, 2001; Brooker, 1996) were selected. Finally, 10 randomly selected Barthelme's postmodern short stories that were translated into Persian were chosen and they are listed below:

English stories:

1. *Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning* – Barthelme (1982)
2. *A Shower of Gold* – Barthelme (1982)
3. *Margins* – Barthelme (1982)

4. *Me and Miss Mandible* – Barthelme (1982)
5. *Some of us had been Threatening our Friend Colby* – Barthelme (1982)
6. *The Glass Mountain* – Barthelme (1982)
7. *City Life* – Barthelme (1982)
8. *The King of Jazz* – Barthelme (1982)
9. *At the End of the Mechanical Age* – Barthelme (1982)
10. *The Balloon* – Barthelme (1982)

Persian Translations:

1. *Robert Kennedy az Gharq Shodan Nejāt Yāft* – Bolouri (2009)
2. *Zar Bārān* – Lame' (2009)
3. *Hāshiyeh-hā* – Moghanlou (2010)
4. *Khānoum-e Mandibel va Man* – Lame' (2009)
5. *Ba'zi az mā Doustemān Kolbi ra Tahdid Mikardim* – Afsar (2013)
6. *Kouh-e Shisheh-i* – Bolouri (2014)
7. *Zendegi-e Shahri* – Bolouri (2014)
8. *Soltān-e Jāz* – Lame' (2009)
9. *Dar Ākhar-e Asr-e Mekāniki* – Afsar (2013)
10. *Bāloun* – Moghanlou (2010)

One of the characteristics of postmodernism is its diverse nature and elusive definition. Therefore, presenting a coherent and unified theory of postmodernism seems not feasible. In literature, this intellectual movement is influenced by a collection of opinions and theories. Even in the synonymous terms proposed by different theorists to discuss the features and intricacies of postmodern stories, there is no theoretical convergence. Nevertheless, emphasis can be placed on the shared aspects of these views (Lewis, 2001). Therefore, to analyze the corpus, a model was developed drawing on Lewis's (2001), Iftekharuddin's (2003), and Payandeh's (2009; 2011) classification of the features associated with postmodern fiction. The model included nine primary elements of pastiche, temporal disorder, intertextuality, fragmentation, vicious circles, paranoia, polyvocality, reader involvement, and death of subject/author. However, the present study narrowed down its scope by excluding pastiche and intertextuality since tracing them in the corpus required the addition of new dimensions to the study to cover stylistic and rhetorical aspects in both English and Persian. Additionally, 'Death of subject' is a perspective, a way of approaching a postmodern fiction, and deals with the party that is considered central and to which the highest significance is attached. This feature is excluded from this practical investigation too. The remaining six features are detailed in the subsequent table, along with their sub-features and their corresponding descriptions to ensure operationalization.

Table 1. Features of postmodern fiction

| No. | Postmodern Features | Sub-features                    | Description  |
|-----|---------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 1   | Temporal Disorder   | Apocryphal history              | Unreal or false accounts of famous events  |
|     |                     | Anachronism                     | Disruption of temporal order by obvious inconsistencies of detail or setting               |
|     |                     | Blending of history and fantasy | Combining the accounts of verifiable historical events with unsubstantiated anecdotes      |
|     |                     | Abundance of incidents          | Abundance of incidents occurring over a single night that distends time beyond recognition |
| 2   | Fragmentation       | Theme attenuation               | Difficult to consider the story to be 'about' such and such                                |
|     |                     | Multiple endings                | Offering numerous possible outcomes for a plot   |
|     |                     |                                 | Leaving the story open-ended   |

|   |                    |                    |   |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|---|
|   |                    | Segmentation       | Breaking the text into fragments or sections separated by numbers, symbols, titles or spaces  |
|   |                    |                    | Fragmenting the fabric of the text with illustrations, typography, or mixed media   |
|   |                    |                    | Printing the story on pages that come in several different colors   |
|   |                    |                    | Using multiple typefaces, fonts, and characters as well as multiple arrangements for pages, footnotes and columns                             |
| 3 | Vicious Circles    | Short circuits     | When the author appears in his own fiction  |
|   |                    | Double binds       | Presence of real-life historical figures in fiction (usually in ways that are inconsistent with or contradictory to verifiable public record) |
| 4 | Paranoia           | Paranoid character | Postmodern heroes find themselves confined to their own plots by authorities  |
|   |                    |                    | Postmodern protagonists suspect that they are trapped in the center of a conspiracy   |
|   |                    | Non-linear plot    | Plot is pounded into small slabs of event and circumstance  |
| 5 | Reader involvement | Reader involvement | Direct address to the reader  |
|   |                    |                    | Open acknowledgement of the fictional nature of the events being described  |
| 6 | Polyvocality       | Polyvocality       | Several narrators recounting the story  |

The initial step in the analysis of the corpus and identification of postmodern features described in the above table involved a thorough study of the English short stories. Subsequently, various books and websites were consulted to gain insights into the themes and postmodern elements present in the stories. The identified postmodern features were then documented and tabulated. In the following stage, the Persian translations of the stories were scrutinized to determine how the postmodern aspects of the original stories were handled in the process of translation.

## Data Analysis and Results

In this section, the postmodern features of each English story are examined thoroughly. Subsequently, the Persian translations of the stories are scrutinized to identify any alterations that may have occurred in their postmodern features as a result of the translation process. The analysis of the first five stories are presented in detail. However, due to spatial constraints, a condensed analysis of the remaining five stories is offered.

### Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning

Analysis of the English story<sup>2</sup>: This story consists of twenty-four short scenes that concern Robert Kennedy. His character is drawn from Senator Robert Kennedy, the brother of former US President, John F. Kennedy. The inclusion of Kennedy in this narrative imbues it with the characteristic of vicious circles (double binds). The scenes depict various situations, predominantly centered around Kennedy's

<sup>2</sup> To analyze this story, the following websites were consulted:

- <http://www.enotes.com/topics/robert-kennedy>
- <http://www.enotes.com/topics/robert-kennedy/themes>
- <http://www.enotes.com/topics/robert-kennedy/characters>
- <http://www.enotes.com/topics/robert-kennedy/critical-essays#critical-essays-critical-overview>



daily routines, and are individually titled, resulting in fragmentation. As a result, the story deviates from the linear structure commonly found in traditional narratives, where events unfold in a specific sequence leading to a climax and subsequent resolution. Instead, Barthelme offers a series of disconnected portraits which shows the fragmentary nature of everyday living. In the story Kennedy is presented in a variety of contexts, but these numerous sketches of him do not give at the end a full-fledged portrait. These scattered images serve as a reflection of the fragmented and disjointed nature of contemporary existence. Specifically, the scenes are arranged in a collage-like manner, and the sequence and arrangement of these scenes significantly influence the interpretation and comprehension of each individual scene. Certain scenes deliberately present contradictions, highlighting stark contrasts and complicating the reader's ability to form a cohesive understanding of Kennedy's character. These contrasts manifest in two distinct forms within the story: either within a single scene or between consecutive scenes. For instance, in the opening scene, a contradiction is presented within a single instance: "He is neither abrupt with nor excessively kind to his associates or he is both abrupt and kind" (Barthelme, 1982, 76). In another scene, Secretary A explains that Kennedy intentionally forgets things, while Secretary B remembers that when she was hospitalized, Kennedy did not forget her and even visited her with a bouquet of flowers. An instance of contrast between scenes can be seen when one of Kennedy's friends talks about his solitary nature and how difficult he is to get to know. The next scene offers Kennedy's own comment on his relationship with crowds of people. Another notable feature of this story is its polyvocality, as it is narrated from the perspective of multiple narrators: 1. The third-person narrator (omniscient), 2. The teacher, friends, and colleagues of Kennedy, and 3. Kennedy himself. Ultimately, the story concludes without revealing the main subject and lacks a definite ending (fragmentation – multiple endings).

Analysis of the Persian Translation: The Persian translation of this story maintains the same structure as the original, consisting of 24 snapshots of the ordinary and mundane things that Kennedy does. The translator has made no omissions or additions to the scenes, and the sequence and titles of the scenes remain unchanged. As a result, the Persian story also lacks a grand theme and a linear plot, and the fragmentary, collage-like presentation of the scenes have remained untouched in translation. Since the sequence of scenes remains the same, the contradictions present in the English text, which contribute to its non-linearity, are also preserved. Furthermore, the Persian translation retains the polyvocality of the original text. The postmodern feature of double binds is also upheld. By using a real-life political figure for his fictional character, Barthelme blurs the boundary between reality and fiction, and this aspect is conveyed by the Persian translator through the incorporation of Robert Kennedy's name. Overall, apart from minor textual changes and translator's footnotes, the Persian translation has transferred all the postmodern features of the English text at a macro level.

### **A Shower of Gold**

Analysis of the English story<sup>3</sup>: This story is a reflection on themes developed mostly by Sartre, the existentialist philosopher. The protagonist, Peterson, is an artist and sculptor who creates artworks using recycled car parts, symbolizing Sartre's belief in finding order and beauty amidst chaos and ugliness. Peterson faces severe financial struggles and reluctantly agrees to participate in a television program that promotes existentialist philosophy in exchange for money. In a meeting with the program host, he candidly expresses feelings of loneliness and emptiness in his life, reflecting Sartre's perspective on the human condition, and this grants him permission to appear on the show. Peterson

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<sup>3</sup> To analyze this story, the following website is consulted:

— <http://www.enotes.com/topics/shower-gold/in-depth>

sees himself as a modest artist, both in his personal life and on the television program. The story comprises multiple extended sections that constantly shift between imagination and reality. The layout of the book accentuates the distinction between these sections, marking the transition between fantasy and actuality. The episodic breaks create a fragmented plot, akin to a collage. In his imaginary realm, Peterson grapples with futile matters but strives to resist their influence. When he finally appears on the program, he disregards the director's warnings and passionately attacks absurdity. He nostalgically reflects on his own insignificant life, finding contentment, and optimistically encourages the audience, assuring them that better days lie ahead. Contrary to his agreement with the director, Peterson emphasizes dignity and self-worth. Peterson in this story represents today's man who is buried under the overload of modern living. He lives in a world where everything is equally important and trivial and he yearns for direction and some sense of priority. This story has more of a plot than do many of Barthelme's stories. However, it is characterized by episodic interruptions and its plot development is unconnected. It is known to be a telling example of verbal collage.

Analysis of the Persian Translation: *A Shower of Gold* is translated into Persian by Lame' (2009) as *Zar Bārān*. Although the reader can trace some kind of plot developed throughout the story, the plot is rather interrupted. The protagonist, Peterson, frequently transitions between the realms of reality and absurdity, oscillating back and forth. These shifts disrupt the story's smooth progression, resulting in a non-linear plot. The fragmented appearance of the story further accentuates this quality. Barthelme employs relatively lengthy paragraphs, and when there is a shift from reality to absurdity, he inserts a double space to separate the paragraphs. The translator has faithfully maintained the plot, preserving the transition from the real to the unreal in the Persian version. However, the fragmentation achieved through paragraph spacing is absent in the translation, and instead, the translator creates a strong sense of cohesion by breaking Barthelme's lengthy paragraphs into smaller ones. Additionally, the translation adopts a conversational style that is not present in the original text.

## Margins

Analysis of the English Story<sup>4</sup>: The story depicts a street conversation involving two individuals. The first person is Carl, an African American man wearing a sign around his neck with a handwritten plea saying that after serving a five-year sentence for a crime he did not commit, now he has difficulty finding a job and is thus reaching out for help (Barthelme, 1982). The second person is Edward, a white man who possesses a book on handwriting analysis. He uses this book to examine Carl's handwriting, the margins surrounding the writing, and his overall personality. Interestingly, Edward has also stolen the book. Throughout their conversation, both individuals fail to grasp a clear understanding of each other's words, resulting in disjointed and fragmented dialogue. The story embraces a non-linear plot, lacking a traditional beginning and end. The characters' backgrounds remain undisclosed, and they are not fully developed as distinct individuals. However, both Carl and Edward pass judgment and make assumptions about one another. The title of the story presents the central theme: margins, which symbolize racial stereotypes. While the margins refer to the physical spaces surrounding the writing on Carl's board, Edward metaphorically alludes to them.

Analysis of the Persian Translation: The most prominent postmodern characteristics of this brief narrative are its plot and theme. It is challenging to perceive the story as having a clear focus or

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<sup>4</sup> To analyze this story, the following websites were consulted:

- <http://www.enotes.com/topics/margins-donald-barthelme>
- <http://www.enotes.com/topics/margins-donald-barthelme/themes>
- <http://www.enotes.com/topics/margins-donald-barthelme/in-depth>

message, demonstrating a thematic attenuation (fragmentation). Instead, it portrays the encounter between two marginalized individuals passing by. As for the plot, it deviates from conventional narratives that typically involve a challenge to be overcome, leading to a new state of affairs. The translation lacks a conventional beginning and ending. It commences in the midst of a conversation which carries on to the end of the story. The plot and theme remain unchanged in the translation.

### Me and Miss Mandible

Analysis of the English Story<sup>5</sup>: This story revolves around a 35-year-old claims adjuster employed by an insurance company. As a consequence of a bureaucratic mistake, he undergoes a punishment that involves being transformed into a sixth-grade student attending an elementary school. The mistake arises from his misunderstanding of his company's motto, "here to help in time of need" (Barthelme, 1982, p. 33), as he attempted to assist an elderly woman with her insurance claim. In his previous life, marked by unsuccessful marriage and career endeavors, he now embraces his new identity as a sixth-grader and strives to make the most out of this unexpected situation. He adjusts his habits to his new life and seems to succeed except for the demands of adults' sexuality which are awakened constantly by her elementary school teacher, Miss Mandible. His scholastic aptitude and physical appearance diverge from those of his classmates, yet the teacher does not undertake any measures to transfer him to a different class. Furthermore, apart from Miss Mandible, another student becomes intrigued by the protagonist and, ultimately, discloses the concealed relationship between Miss Mandible and the central character to the school principal as the story concludes. Consequently, the teacher experiences sexual fulfilment in the relationship but faces termination of her employment due to the act of deceiving her student.

This story is characterized by a fragmentary layout. The fragments are twenty-six dated entries, spanning from 13 September to 8 December, pasted on a dozen of pages. They present an incomplete depiction of the protagonist's past life and his current role as a school boy, thereby strengthening the temporal disorder of the story. Moreover, the story lacks coherence in providing details and background information, making it challenging to ascertain the protagonist within a specific timeframe (anachronism). Additionally, the protagonist exhibits signs of paranoia, both conspiracy and confinement types. On the one hand, he believes a conspiracy has brought him back to the elementary school (the entry dated 2 October). He also thinks he has sometimes been betrayed, deliberately (the entry dated 19 September). On the other hand, he feels he is deliberately confined by his employer to his new role (the entry dated 13 October).

Analysis of the Persian Translation: *Me and Miss Mandible* is translated into Persian by Lame' (2008) as *Khānoum-e Mandibel va Man*. The features that have qualified the English story as postmodern have been retained in the Persian version too. The translator has faithfully conveyed the fragmented structure of the story, keeping the entries unchanged and even preserving the original dates without converting them from Gregorian to Solar. The translation maintains the blurred boundary between the protagonist's childhood and adulthood, as well as the disjointed timeline of the original story. The entries that vividly depict the protagonist's paranoia remain untouched in the translation, serving the same function.

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<sup>5</sup> To analyze this story, the following websites are consulted:

- <http://courses.wcupa.edu/fletcher/amadio.htm>
- <http://www.jessamyn.com/barth/mandiblearticle.html>



### Some of us had been Threatening our Friend Colby

Analysis of the English Story<sup>6</sup>: This story revolves around a group of individuals who decide to execute their friend, William, due to his perceived extravagance. However, the specifics regarding when, where, and how he has been extravagant remain unclear. All of William's friends are men with different professions, such as an architect, painter, orchestra conductor, environmental activist, and car rental owner. They collaborate in organizing the execution ceremony, including tasks like writing invitations, arranging transportation for guests, planning musical performances, selecting instruments, and determining the method of execution. William's friends form a tightly-knit group that aims to supplant the country's laws with their own. The story seems to satirize groups that prioritize male relationships and group solidarity to such an extent that William complies with his execution simply because the group believes he has been extravagant. As the story plays with the name of William Colby, the former director of the CIA, it is probable that one of the underlying themes is to ridicule figures of authority and organizations such as the CIA (vicious circle – double binds). Contradictions are also evident throughout the story. For instance, William is punished for not conforming to the group's norms and failing to act rationally and thoughtfully. While rationality appears to be a key criterion emphasized in the discussions about the ceremony, the characters in the story clearly exhibit an irrational approach in certain matters, such as prioritizing the care for a tree over that for a human life.

Analysis of the Persian Translation: *Some of us had been Threatening our Friend Colby* is translated into Persian by Afsar (2013) as *Ba'zi az mā Doustemān Kolbi rā Tahdid Mikardim*. This story lacks polyvocality, as it is narrated solely by one of Colby's friends from beginning to end. Furthermore, there is no direct engagement with the readers to involve them in the narrative. The story does not exhibit any immediately apparent fragmentation in its structure. However, the presence of contradictions throughout creates a sense of fragmentation. These qualities are equally evident in the Persian text. In addition, a notable aspect of Colby's story is the vicious circle it portrays. The name William Egan Colby refers to the former director of the Central Intelligence Agency in the United States, introducing double binds that blur the line between reality and fiction. This vicious circle (double binds) is also present in the Persian story.

### Analysis of Five Other Stories

The story *The Glass Mountain* displays a notable level of fragmentation. It is composed of 100 numbered segments, with the majority consisting of a single sentence. This fragmentation is faithfully maintained in the translation, as the Persian version also comprises 100 numbered segments of similar lengths. Similarly, *City Life* is marked by its fragmented structure. The narrative is divided into 18 numbered episodes, which are also present in the Persian text, maintaining the same count of 18 episodes. The non-linear plot of the story is evident in the translation as well.

*The King of Jazz* is considered a postmodern story primarily due to its distinctive writing style. However, the non-linearity of its plot also contributes to its postmodern nature, and this aspect is preserved in the Persian translation. *The Balloon* tells the story of a massive balloon floating over New York City, inflated by the narrator. The balloon elicits various reactions from people, both children and adults, yet the reason for its presence and its meaning remain undisclosed until the end. This short story is known for its postmodern quality in resisting a singular interpretation or understanding. It emphasizes

<sup>6</sup> To analyze this story, the following websites were consulted:

- <http://www.enotes.com/topics/some-us-had-been-threatening-our-friend-colby>
- <http://www.enotes.com/topics/some-us-had-been-threatening-our-friend-colby/themes>
- <http://www.enotes.com/topics/some-us-had-been-threatening-our-friend-colby/in-depth>

the possibility of multiple perspectives, embracing plurality. However, none of the postmodern fiction features summarized in the analysis model for the corpus were found in this story.

*At the End of the Mechanical Age* revolves around a narrator who meets and falls in love with a woman. They engage in discussions about their philosophies of life and eventually get married. The story unfolds at the end of the mechanical age, marking the transition from industrial society to the post-industrial society. This aspect qualifies the story as postmodern as Barthelme suggests the decline of the mechanical age and the emergence of a post-industrial society. The two main characters in the story speculate on what the new age will be like. None of the mentioned features in the analysis model were found in this story.

After examining the entire corpus, the identified postmodern features in English stories and their translation approach in Persian stories have been summarized in the following table.

Table 2. Translation of postmodern features in the corpus

| No. | Short Stories   | English Story Postmodern Features  |                    | Treatment of PM Features in Translation |         |
|-----|---|--|--------------------|---|---------|
|     |   |  |                    | Preserved                               | Removed |
| 1   | <i>Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning</i>               | Fragmentation (leaving the story open-ended)   |                    | ✓                                       |         |
|     |   | Fragmentation (segmentation: breaking the text into fragments by titles)                       |                    | ✓                                       |         |
|     |   | Vicious circles (double binds: presence of a real-life historical figure in fiction)           |                    | ✓                                       |         |
|     |   | Paranoia (non-linear plot)   |                    | ✓                                       |         |
|     |   | Polyvocality (several narrators)   |                    | ✓                                       |         |
| 2   | <i>A Shower of Gold</i>                                 | Fragmentation (segmentation: breaking the text into fragments separated by spaces)             |                    |   | ✓       |
|     |   | Paranoia (non-linear plot)   |                    | ✓                                       |         |
| 3   | <i>Margins</i>  | Paranoia (non-linear plot)   |                    | ✓                                       |         |
|     |   | Fragmentation (theme attenuation)  |                    | ✓                                       |         |
| 4   | <i>Me and Miss Mandible</i>                             | Temporal disorder (anachronism)  |                    | ✓                                       |         |
|     |   | Fragmentation (segmentation: breaking the text into fragments separated by dates)              |                    | ✓                                       |         |
|     |   | Paranoia   | Plot – conspiracy  | ✓                                       |         |
|     |   |  | Plot – confinement | ✓                                       |         |
| 5   | <i>Some of us had been Threatening our Friend Colby</i> | Vicious circle (double binds)  |                    | ✓                                       |         |
| 6   | <i>The Glass Mountain</i>                               | Fragmentation (breaking the text into fragments separated by numbers) – 100 numbered sentences |                    | ✓                                       |         |
| 7   | <i>City Life</i>  | Fragmentation (breaking the text into fragments separated by numbers) – 18 numbered episodes   |                    | ✓                                       |         |

|    |   |                            |   |   |
|----|---|----------------------------|---|---|
|    |   | Paranoia (non-linear plot) | ✓ |   |
| 8  | <i>The King of Jazz</i>                 | Paranoia (non-linear plot) | ✓ |   |
| 9  | <i>At the End of the Mechanical Age</i> | ---                        | - | - |
| 10 | <i>The Balloon</i>                      | ---                        | - | - |

## Discussion and Conclusion

Donald Barthelme, an unconventional postmodern writer, defies traditional artistic norms and presents stories that prioritize the essence of art for art's sake, independent of explicit meaning. His concise and relatively short narratives exhibit non-linear structures and lack a cohesive and unified framework. Barthelme's stories resist sequential scenes, favoring structural disruption over prescribed order. Employing collage as a narrative tool, he combines fragmented and disparate scenes, resulting in character development that lacks strong delineation and leaves readers with an elusive understanding. This fragmentation and dispersion mirror the disarray prevalent in contemporary modern societies. Indeed, Barthelme's works explore themes of instability, confusion, and existential emptiness, albeit occasionally incorporating a hopeful outlook on life. Unraveling the intricate layers of meaning within Barthelme's stories proves challenging, as he purposefully engulfs meaning within an aura of ambiguity, affording readers the opportunity to derive diverse interpretations from the narrative. Consequently, readers are compelled to adopt alternative and diverse perspectives, transcending conventional roles, while Barthelme, with his distinctive writing style, empowers them to engage in multifaceted comprehension and interpretation of the stories.

In the Persian translations, a considerable number of Barthelme's postmodern story features have been successfully retained. The plots of the stories have been faithfully transferred to Persian without alterations. The collage-like arrangement of story fragments has also been preserved in the translations. Specifically, the postmodern characteristics examined in this research, such as the absence of a cohesive and linear structure, fragmentation, double binds, temporal disorder, polyvocality, and paranoia, are present in the Persian translations without any modifications. The fragmented structure is evident in all cases except for the translation of the story *Zar Bārān*, where the translator has made changes by breaking down lengthy paragraphs into shorter ones and even changing them into dialogue. Although the stories *At the End of the Mechanical Age* and *The Balloon* are considered by literary experts to be postmodern, they do not possess any of the specific postmodern features outlined in the research model. Consequently, the significant presence of postmodern elements in the examined translations confirms their high translatability throughout the translation process.

Although the topic of manipulations in translation is frequently discussed, it appears that when it comes to postmodern stories, these manipulations are minimized or even absent, particularly at levels beyond the sentence. This discrepancy may be attributed to the fact that translation analysis models primarily focus on sentence-level analysis, while postmodern features predominantly emerge at higher levels, such as theme, plot, character, and narrator. Similarly, the formal aspects of postmodern texts extend beyond the sentence level, encompassing punctuation, spacing, paragraph breaks, and overall page layout. As a result, postmodern features in fiction cannot be reduced to the sentence level and may elude the translator's strategies. Another possibility is that the translators may have been unaware of these features or felt compelled to preserve them in their original form, as manipulating extra-sentential features would necessitate embarking on a writing endeavor.

Preserving the postmodern features of fiction in translation can have implications for contemporary literature. It may serve as a medium for introducing postmodernism into the local literary polysystem, potentially leading to the production of works in the same genre within contemporary Persian literature in Iran.

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