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Translation of Iranian Socio-cultural Image in Fansubbed Movies

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the representation of the Iranian Self in Persian movies through English fansubtitles, exploring how the subtitling process shapes the socio-cultural image presented to non-Iranian audiences. To this end, eleven award-winning Persian films produced by prominent Iranian filmmakers Asghar Farhadi, Majid Majidi, and Abbas Kiarostami and their English subtitles were analyzed using an integrated framework specifically developed for this research. Image-representative elements in the films were identified according to the framework, and the translation strategies employed in the English subtitles for rendering these image-representative elements were examined. The effects of these strategies on the representation of the image were then categorized into five observed outcomes: intensification of the image, weakening of the image, positive recasting of the image, preservation of the image, and omission of the image. The findings indicate that universally recognized elements were generally preserved in fansubs, while elements associated with Iranian religious or legal contexts were more frequently omitted or weakened, potentially diminishing the representation of these culturally distinct aspects for non-Iranian audience. This study highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity and accuracy in audiovisual translation, offering valuable insights for fostering cross-cultural understanding and enhancing the portrayal of cultural identity in translated media.

Keywords: Self, Other, image, representation, fansubbing

Introduction

The concept of Self vs. Other has been widely examined across various fields, with Otherness defined as a sense of difference. As Cole (1995, p. 35) notes, "Self is in fact produced by difference and by contrast, a search for an isolated and original Self is doomed to failure". The way Otherness is perceived by audiences varies depending on the context in which it is presented. Richardson (2010, p. 13) explains that "the 'Other' may be racially or culturally defined, determining the difference between particular groups or nations or between broader entities."

In recent decades, scholars in Translation Studies have broadened their focus to include cultural and social issues, such as the representation and image-making of the source culture through translation, a process shaped by translators and other agents involved (Milton & Bandia, 2009). In audiovisual translation, these representations are especially impactful. For many viewers who lack direct exposure to the Other, translated media forms their primary understanding of foreign cultures, often via stereotypical portrayals (Berg, 2002; Schweinitz, 2011). In movies, for instance, audiences encounter Otherness within a broader sense of identity and diversity, where "complex intercultural discourses and representations, not only of identity and diversity, but also of inclusion and exclusion" play a role (Bosinelli et al., 2005, p. 405). Audiovisual content is thus a potent means of shaping perceptions of the Other (Kuran-Burçoğlu, 2000) and through translation, the sense of Otherness depicted in audiovisual products can be intensified or mitigated.

The study of how nations and cultures are represented in translations is known as imagology, defined as the analysis of "national and cultural stereotypes from a translational and comparative point of view" (Doorslaer, 2019, p. 57). Imagology seeks to understand how such representations shape translation practices, sometimes amplifying the role of cultural stereotypes (Kuran-Burçoğlu, 2000, p. 144). Imagological analysis can apply to both textual and audiovisual translations, exploring the representation of cultures in various media.

Several studies have applied imagology to Translation Studies. Seifert (2005), for example, examined images of Canada in German youth literature, while Frank (2007) analyzed how Austrian culture was depicted in children's books. Both studies found that translation often simplified or stereotyped these images, prioritizing clichés over cultural nuances. Kuran-Burçoğlu (2000) explored the impact of the Other's image on different stages of the translation process. According to Kuran-Burçoğlu (2000, p. 145), this influence extends across "three stages of the translation phenomenon": the pre-translation stage, the actual translation process, and the reception of the translated text. While the image of the Other affects readers in the third stage, it impacts translators in the first two stages by shaping text selection and influencing translation choices, such as omissions, additions, or lexical adjustments based on the Other's image in the translator's mind.

As imagology considers the "genesis of the Other" within socio-cultural constraints (Kuran-Burçoğlu, 2000, p. 144), cultural differences are crucial to image studies. Although there has been limited research in Iran linking image studies with audiovisual translation, several Iranian studies have explored cultural differences in translation. For instance, Khoshsaligheh and Ameri (2014) examined strategies Iranian audiovisual translators used to handle taboo words when translating English into Persian. They found that translators often softened such language to align with Iranian cultural standards (Khoshsaligheh & Ameri, 2014, pp. 42-43). Similarly, Pakar and Khoshsaligheh (2020) analyzed cultural and ideological aspects in the Persian dubbing of *House of Cards*, noting that political, social, and religious considerations led to extensive censorship to meet audience expectations.

With a focus on the representation of the Other, Nemati Lafmejani and Parham (2016) developed a model to identify elements that convey the image of the Other in audiovisual media. Mollanazar and Nemati Lafmejani (2017) examined the portrayal of the Other in American animations dubbed into Persian, finding that translators often downplayed references to the Other.

While previous studies have addressed how Persian translations of foreign media represent the Other, there is a lack of research on how Persian films translated into English portray the Self for an international audience. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating how Iranian fansubbers represent the Self in English subtitles of Persian prize-winning films and the ways these translations may alter or reshape this image for non-Iranian viewers. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions: 1) How do Iranian volunteer translators (fansubbers) strive to present the Self (Iranian society and culture) to the Other (English-speaking international audience)? and 2) What effects do image-representative elements have on the portrayal of the Self?

Methodology

The Corpus

The corpus for this study consists of eleven Persian drama films, totaling 994 minutes, directed by prominent Iranian filmmakers Asghar Farhadi, Majid Majidi, and Abbas Kiarostami. These films are paired with their corresponding English fan-made subtitles.

The selected films, each released internationally, have played a significant role in presenting aspects of Iranian society to audiences outside of Iran. Farhadi, Majidi, and Kiarostami are widely acclaimed in the international film community, celebrated for their compelling storytelling and cultural insight. Their work has received recognition at major film festivals, enhancing the visibility and influence of Iranian cinema worldwide. This acclaim gives their films added impact in shaping how international viewers perceive Iranian culture, values, and social dynamics. The corpus includes:

– *Dancing in Dust* (*Raqs dar Ghobar*), 2003, directed by Asghar Farhadi

– *The Beautiful City* (*Shahr-e Ziba*), 2004, directed by Asghar Farhadi

– *Fireworks Wednesday* (*Chaharshanbe Souri*), 2006, directed by Asghar Farhadi

– *About Elly* (*Darbare-ye Elly*), 2009, directed by Asghar Farhadi

– *A Separation* (*Jodai-e Nader az Simin*), 2011, directed by Asghar Farhadi

– *Taste of Cherry* (*Ta'am-e Gilas*), 1997, directed by Abbas Kiarostami

– *Children of Heaven* (*Bache-ha-ye Aseman*), 1997, directed by Majid Majidi

– *The Color of Paradise* (*Rang-e Khoda*), 1999, directed by Majid Majidi

– *Rain* (*Baran*), 2001, directed by Majid Majidi

– *The Willow Tree* (*Bid-e Majnoun*), 2005, directed by Majid Majidi

– *The Song of Sparrows* (*Avaz-e Gonjeshk-ha*), 2008, directed by Majid Majidi

These films were chosen because they depict the intricacies of everyday life in Iran, making them relevant for analyzing how Iranian self-image is presented to international viewers. The English subtitles for these films were sourced from Subscene.com (www.subscene.com), a widely-used platform in Iran. Subscene.com is commonly used by both fansubbers and viewers and is even utilized by some local video-on-demand services, providing a central hub for sharing subtitles across multiple languages, including Persian.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was guided by an integrated model that combines multiple theoretical frameworks to examine how image-representative elements in Iranian cinema are conveyed through Persian-language films and their English subtitles.

To identify these image-representative elements, Weber's (1968) model of society which consists of political, cultural, and economic dimensions was used as the primary framework. Since the cultural dimension is essential for understanding the societal values and norms represented in the films, only this dimesnion was included in this study, while the political and economic dimensions were excluded.

To operationalize the cultural dimension, Anderson and Taylor's (2007) model of culture was utilized, which identifies five core components of culture: morals, beliefs, values, folkways, and language. All five components were analyzed in this study. The language component was further operationalized based on Wardhaugh's (2006) framework, which highlights taboos and euphemisms as two main aspects of language crucial for conveying cultural significance. Additionally, Qanbar's (2011) classification was employed to identify specific categories of taboos within the films' dialogues. The integrated model is presented in Figure 1.
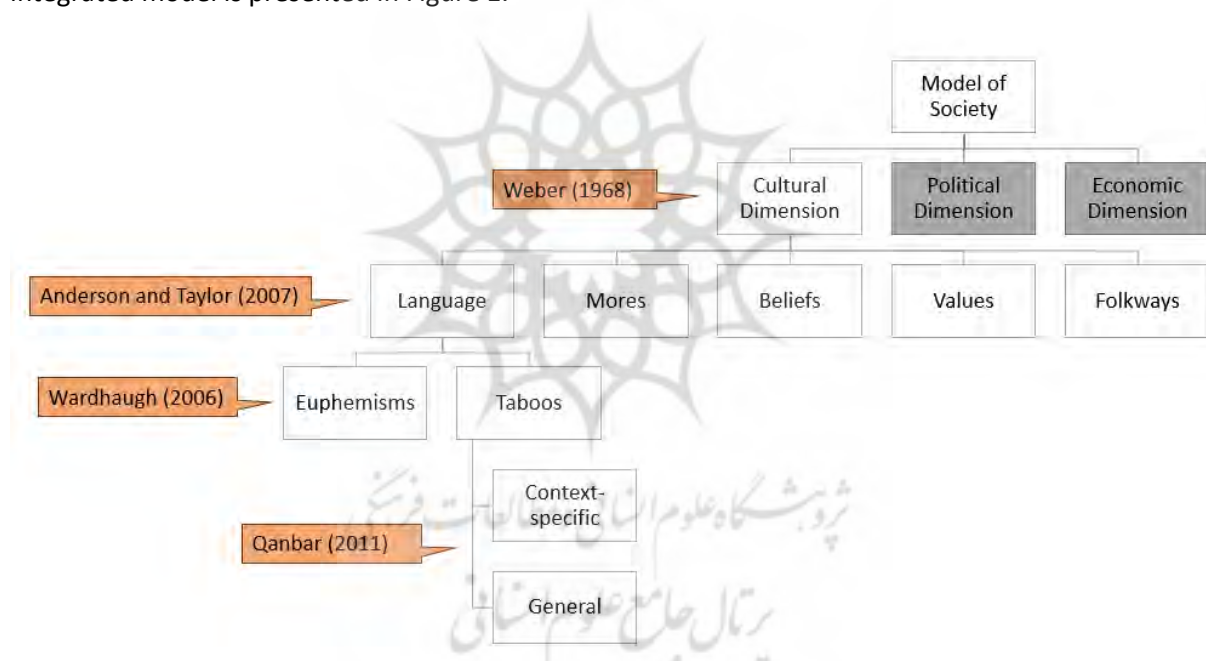

Figure 1. Integrated Model of Society for the Identification of Image-representative Elements

In the integrated model of analysis, "**folkways**" are defined as "the general standards of behavior adhered to by a group of people" (Anderson & Taylor, 2007, p. 62). This category includes ordinary customs observed by different cultural groups, such as ways of greeting, home decoration, or food preparation.

"**Mores**" refer to "norms that are widely observed and have great moral significance". Mores usually address issues of right and wrong, good and bad, and are often enforced through formal sanctions such as laws or social rejection (Anderson & Taylor, 2004, p. 57). Examples include formal laws, religious doctrines, prohibitions against theft, respect for authority, honesty, patriotism, and respect for the elderly.

"**Beliefs**" are shared knowledge collectively held by people in a given culture. Beliefs provide "a meaning system around which a culture is organized" (Anderson & Taylor, 2007, p. 63) and may stem

from religion, myth, folklore, or science. The American folklore belief in the legend of Bigfoot serves as an example.

"**Values**" are defined as "abstract standards in a society or group that define the ideal principles of what is desirable and morally correct" (Anderson & Taylor, 2007, p. 63). While abstract, values provide a framework for behavior, with examples including ideals like freedom and equity. Societal norms often reflect these underlying values.

The "**language**" component in the integrated model is explored based on Wardhaugh's (2006) theoretical framework which sees taboos and euphemisms as windows into culture. "**Taboo**" is defined as "the prohibition or avoidance in any society of behavior believed to be harmful to its members in that it would cause them anxiety, embarrassment, or shame" (Wardhaugh, 2006, p. 239). Taboos can be either context-specific or general (Qanbar 2011).

"**Context-specific taboos**" are words that are neutral in their general meanings but become taboo in certain contexts. For example, while the Persian word *sag* (meaning "dog") is neutral when referring to the animal, it becomes a taboo word when used to address a person. Similarly, terms related to physical or social defects or characteristics are not inherently taboo but can become so when used derogatorily, as with *kachal* (meaning "bald").

On the other hand, "**general taboos**" are words that are either absolutely forbidden or can only be used with mitigating expressions to reduce their illocutionary force (Qanbar, 2011, p. 92).

The films in the corpus were reviewed to identify image-representative elements in the Persian dialogue that align with the components of the integrated model. Then, the corresponding English subtitles for these elements were examined to observe how they were treated in translation.

Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis of the selected films was guided by the aim of examining how elements representing the image of the Self (Iranian society and its people) are translated for the Other (non-Iranian audiences) through English subtitles. After identifying the image-representative elements in the Persian dialogue based on the categories outlined in Figure 1, the corresponding English subtitles were analyzed to observe how these elements were translated.

The first step was to categorize the translation strategies used for each identified image-representative element, drawing on Baker's (1992, pp. 25-29) typology of translation strategies. This typology includes eight strategies: deletion, addition, attenuation, neutralization, substitution, generalization, paraphrase, and loan word. By identifying which strategy was employed for each instance, we could assess how the image-representative elements were handled in English subtitles.

Non-verbal elements were not taken into consideration during this analysis, as the focus was solely on the verbal components of the films.

Following the analysis of translation strategies used for each image-representative element, it became evident that the impact of these strategies on the representation of the Self could be classified into five categories:

– *Intensification of the Image*: The translation made the image-representative element stronger or more intense compared to the original, emphasizing that aspect of Iranian society more strongly.

– *Weakening of the Image*: The translation rendered the image-representative element less intense or softened compared to the original, diminishing the emphasis on that aspect of Iranian society.

- *Positive Recasting of the Image*: The translation made the image-representative element more positive or refined, presenting the Self in a more favorable light compared to the original.

- *No Change to the Image*: The image-representative element was translated without any changes, preserving the original representation of the Self.

- *Omission of the Image*: The image-representative element was omitted entirely, removing the reference to the Self in the translation.

This classification allowed us to determine whether the translation of image-representative elements in the films preserved, omitted, weakened, intensified, or even enhanced the portrayal of Iranian society and values when presented to an international audience.

Results

The data analysis showed that the elements in the films representing the image of the Self were handled in translation according to one of five categories: Intensification of the Image, Weakening of the Image, Positive Recasting of the Image, No Change to the Image, and Omission of the Image. A few examples for each category are provided below.

The first example is a scene from *Fireworks Wednesday* (2006), directed by Asghar Farhadi, at the timestamp 12:48. In this scene, Morteza, the husband, receives a call from his office. His wife, Mozhdeh, who suspects he is having an affair with their neighbor, asks him to stay and talk (see Figure 2). In a hurry, Morteza responds rudely, saying, " منم می‌گم تو چرا زر می‌زنی وقتی یارو اونجا زنگ می‌زنه التماس می‌کنه می‌گه فرس ماژره، بعد من باید وایسم به شر و ورای تو گوش کنم؟" which literally translates to "I'm asking you why you're babbling when the guy is calling over there, begging, saying it's an emergency, and I have to stay here and listen to your nonsense?" This sentence contains taboo words, classified as a 'language' element in the study's integrated model of analysis. In the corresponding English subtitle, however, the line reads: "The guy begged me to come and help him. It is urgent, and you want me to stay?" This translation softens the tone by omitting the taboo words "زر می‌زنی" (equivalent to "why are you babbling?"), "یارو" (a casual or disrespectful way to refer to someone), and "شر و ور" ("nonsense" or "bullshit"). The absence of these impolite terms in the English subtitle presents the characters in a more positive light, improving the image of the Self as perceived by the Other (i.e., the non-Iranian audience). Thus, this instance falls under Positive Recasting of the Image.

Figure 2. *Fireworks Wednesday* – Positive Recasting of the Image

Another instance of Positive Recasting of the Image is found in *About Elly* (2009). In a scene at timestamp 23:03 (see Figure 3), Ahmad's friend urges him to eat more, joking that he will not find such gourmet food in Germany. The original line reads, " بزن احمد جون که از این چیزا تو آلمان گیرت نمیاد کوفت کنیا," which literally translates to, "Eat up, dear Ahmad, because you won't get stuff like this in Germany to choke down." This phrase contains a taboo expression (کوفت کنیا) classified under the 'language' element in the study's model of analysis. However, in translation, the line is softened to "eat up", omitting the crass tone. This absence of offensive language in the English subtitle portrays the characters more positively, thus enhancing the image of the Self for the Other.

Figure 3. *About Elly* – Positive Recasting of the Image

The third example is a scene from *A Separation* (2011), directed by Asghar Farhadi, at the timestamp of 1:01:30. Nader, the film's male protagonist, faces an accusation that he caused Razieh, his father's caregiver, to miscarry her baby after he forcibly removed her from his apartment, causing her to fall down the stairs. During a court hearing, the judge informs Nader that his alleged crime requires the payment of forty million tomans as *Diya* (see Figure 4). In Persian, the line reads: "چهل میلیون دیه است" which literally translates to "The Diya is forty million tomans."

Under Iranian-Islamic law, Nader's act is treated as attempted murder, obliging the accused to pay *Diya* as a form of restitution. *Diya* is a customary payment made to a victim or their next of kin as financial compensation for bodily harm or death, grounded in Islamic law principles that aim to achieve justice through reparative payment.

According to this study's analytical framework, this scene includes an instance of "mores (legal rules)". Based on Baker's translation strategies, the Persian term *Diya* was translated into English as "blood money", employing the strategy of paraphrase, which rephrases a source concept in a different form in the target text. This translation intensifies the image of the Self in the English subtitle by more explicitly conveying the meaning and legal-cultural weight of *Diya*.

Figure 4. *A Separation* – Intensification of the Image

The fourth example comes from another scene in *About Elly* (2009), capturing a tense moment at timestamp 1:25:57 (see Figures 5 and 6). Elly's friends are beginning to lose hope of finding her after she goes missing, so they contact a man they believe to be her brother. However, Sepideh, Elly's close friend, reveals that he is not her brother but her fiancé. When the truth is revealed, the following exchange occurs:

- این اصلا برادرش نیست نامزدشه.

- مگه نامزد داره؟

- یا علی!

In the English subtitle, the dialogue is translated as:

- He is not her brother at all. He is her fiancé.

- She has a fiancé?

- Damn!

In the final line, Peyman cries out in shock and disbelief, "Ya Ali!" In this context, "Ya Ali" is an exclamation invoking Imam Ali, a figure highly revered by Shia Muslims, and serves to express both shock and a sense of religious gravity. The translation renders this line as "damn!" which conveys the shock but omits the religious reference and cultural depth embedded in the original expression. This instance, categorized as "beliefs" in the study's integrated model, was translated using the strategy of substitution. The result is a Weakening of the Image, as the religious significance of the original expression is lost in translation.

Figure 5. *About Elly* – Weakening of the Image, Part 1

Figure 6. *About Elly* – Weakening of the Image, Part 2

Another similar instance occurs in *A Separation* (timestamp 17:08), where Razieh, the caregiver, notices that the elderly man has urinated in his pants (see Figure 7). She warns her daughter to leave the area and to put on slippers, explaining that the place is "najes" because of the urine. The Persian dialogue reads "برو تو، درم ببند. یه دمپایی هم بپوش. می‌بینی که اینجاها نجسه!", which literally means, "Go inside, close the door, and put on some slippers. Can't you see the area is impure!" In the English subtitle, this line is rendered as, "Go get your shoes. You can't see the floor is wet!". "Najes" is a religious term indicating ritual impurity and is categorized as "mores (religious rules)" in the study's model of analysis. Here, it is translated using a neutralization strategy as "wet," which removes the religious undertone of the original term. This omission of the religious reference results in a Weakening of the Image.

Figure 7. *A Separation* – Weakening of the Image

In the following example, the image-representative element is conveyed accurately in English without any change. The scene in Figure 8 is from *The Beautiful City* (2004), which takes place in a prison where there is a discussion as to why a teenage inmate – who committed murder at age 16 – was upset when his fellow inmates arranged an 18th birthday party for him. Under the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the death penalty cannot be imposed on offenders under 18. Since age 16, he has been held in a juvenile detention center, but now, upon turning 18, he is legally eligible for execution.

The image-representative element here is the reference to execution, which falls under the category of "mores (legal rules)" based on the study's analysis model. The Persian dialogue reads: " امروز هجده سالش تموم میشه. یعنی وقت اعدامشه", which is translated as, "He's turning eighteen today. Meaning it's time for his execution." This scene, therefore, exemplifies "No Change to the Image."
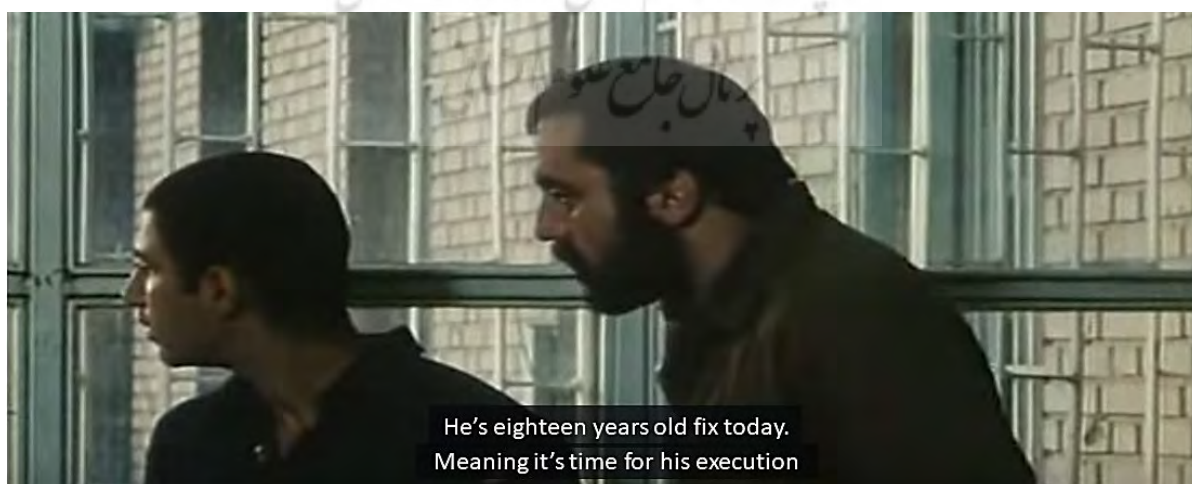

Figure 8. *The Beautiful City* – No Change to the Image

The final instance is from *Fireworks Wednesday* (50:48), where students stand in the schoolyard reciting the traditional Iranian New Year prayer, "یا مقلب القلوب و الابصار" (Figure 9). This prayer, in which

people ask God to improve their circumstances for the best, is an integral part of Iranian culture. According to the study's model of analysis, it falls under the category of "beliefs" and is translated using the deletion strategy. This omission results in a case of "Omission of the Image."

Figure 9. *Fireworks Wednesday* – Omission of the Image

Examination of the corpus led to the identification of 127 instance of image-representative elements in Persian movies, belonging to one of the five major categories of language, folkways, mores, beliefs and values. These elements were marked and their corresponding English subtitles were analyzed to assess how these elements were translated and what effect the translation had on the image of Self (Iranian society and culture) presented to Other (non-Iranian audience). Table 1 below presents the results of analysis, illustrating the impact of audiovisual translation on the representation of each category of image-representative elements.

Table 1. Effect of Translation on Image Representation

Image-representative Elements	Intensification of Image		Weakening of Image		Positive Recasting of Image		No Change to Image		Omission of Image	
Language	0		0		22		4		0	
Folkways	0		3		0		1		0	
Mores	7		7		0		22		22	
Beliefs	2		4		0		15		6	
Values	0		3		0		8		1	
Total	9	**7%**	17	**13%**	22	**17%**	50	**40%**	29	**23%**

As Table 1 indicates, in 40% of the cases, the image of Self in the Persian movies has remained intact after translation into English subtitles. However, 23% of image-representative elements were omitted, resulting in the loss of certain nuances of Iranian society and culture (the Self). Additionally, in 13% of cases, the image was weakened due to the translation strategies employed by fansubbers. Together, omissions and weakening account for 36% of the total data, indicating that in these

instances, the Other is provided with a more distant and diminished access to the cultural aspects and everyday life of the Self.

Conversely, 17% of the cases feature a positive recasting of the image, which enhances the portrayal of Iranian society, presenting a more favorable or refined perspective. Finally, in a smaller portion of cases (7%), the image is intensified, with certain cultural or societal elements being emphasized more strongly than in the original. This could influence the audience's perception by drawing attention to specific traits or values of Iranian culture.

Table 1 further illustrates that the image of the Self is predominantly manipulated in terms of mores, which largely include religious and legal elements. The high frequency of "Omission of the Image" within the mores category may reflect an attempt to bridge the cultural gap between the Self and the Other, potentially enhancing accessibility for the target audience by omitting religious elements. This aligns with Kuran-Burcoglu's (2000) observation that, in intercultural contexts, individuals may downplay certain beliefs to foster acceptance.

In the beliefs category, of the 27 cases analyzed, 15 remained unchanged while 12 were altered. Among these, ten instances involved omission or weakening by fansubbers, supporting Venuti's (1995) assertion that dissimilarities are sometimes minimized to meet the expectations and belief systems of the intended audience.

For values, out of the total cases, eight were translated without modification, while four were either weakened or omitted. The preserved instances mostly reflect values that resonate universally across cultures, suggesting that fansubbers may have sought to underscore common ground between the Self and Other by retaining or emphasizing these shared values.

The overall effect of translating mores, language, beliefs, values, and folklores on the representation of the image of Iranian society is summarized in Figure 10 below.
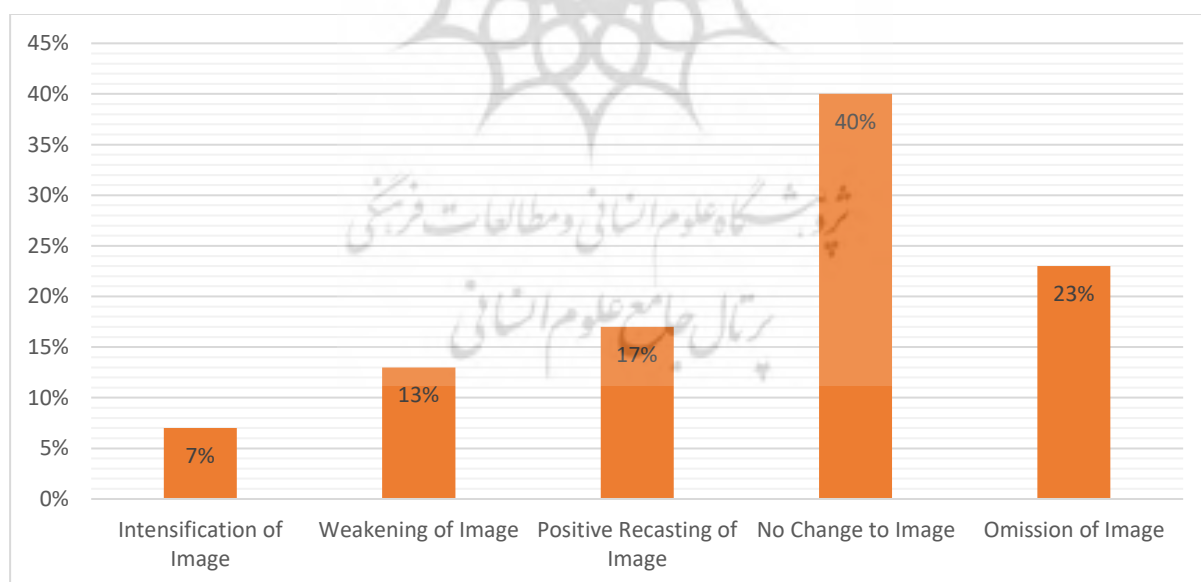

Figure 10. Representation of Iranians as Self to Non-Iranians as Other

Table 2 illustrates the relationship between the translation strategies used for image-representative elements and their impact on the representation of the Self. In 50 out of 127 cases, the image remained unchanged. However, in the remaining 77 cases, the image was altered through one of four processes: intensification, weakening, positive recasting, or omission. Each of these effects resulted from specific translation strategies. For instance, intensification was primarily achieved through strategies of addition and paraphrasing. In contrast, weakening often resulted from

neutralization, substitution, and, notably, generalization, which negatively affected the portrayal of Iranian society.

Positive recasting was primarily accomplished through deletion and attenuation. Deletion enhanced the image in cases where taboo language in the original dialogue was omitted in the English subtitles, reducing the undesirable impact of certain expressions; however, while this sometimes increased the politeness of the dialogue, it occasionally reduced its sense of intimacy. Attenuation also contributed significantly to positive recasting by adding minimizers or mitigating offensive language.

A possible explanation for cases of image omission is provided by Faiq (2004, p. 35), who notes that societies may "negate, even suppress" distinctions when engaging with other nations or cultures. Subtitles may omit certain distinctions to facilitate understanding for the target audience or to promote a more favorable cultural image. In this regard, deletion and substitution were the primary strategies contributing to image omission.

Table 2. The Relationship Between Translation Strategies and Image Representation

Translation Strategy	Intensification of Image	Weakening of Image	Positive Recasting of Image	No Change to Image	Omission of Image
Deletion	0	0	8	0	24
Addition	3	0	0	0	0
Attenuation	0	0	10	0	0
Neutralization	0	3	0	0	0
Substitution	0	2	4	0	5
Generalization	0	12	0	0	0
Paraphrase	6	0	0	50	0
Loan Word	0	0	0	0	0

Conclusion

Analysis This study examined the representation of the Iranian Self in Persian movies through English fansubtitles, aiming to understand how the subtitling process affects the cultural image conveyed to English-speaking audiences. By analyzing eleven Persian films and their subtitles, a total of 127 image-representative elements were identified and categorized based on five observed effects: intensification, weakening, positive recasting, preservation, and omission. The findings indicated that while more universal or widely recognized image-representative elements were often left intact, elements unique to Iranian religious or legal contexts were more likely to be omitted or weakened, potentially diminishing the portrayal of these distinct aspects of Iranian society and culture.

These observations imply a selective approach in translation, where certain elements are emphasized, minimized, or excluded to cater to the target audience's background and expectations. This selective process may stem from power imbalances, cultural differences, the desire to appeal to Western audiences, or a need to sidestep sensitive topics. Translation, in this context, functions not merely as a linguistic exercise but as a transfer of cultural meaning shaped by the translator's own values and beliefs. Ideology and translation are therefore closely intertwined, as translation choices can promote, modify, or suppress ideological beliefs and practices. For instance, the frequent omission of religious references in the mores category reflects an effort to reduce the perceived

cultural distance between the Self and the Other, often favoring universal values over distinct cultural markers. This finding resonates with Merkle (2010), Kenevisi et al. (2016), and Khoshsaligheh and Ameri's (2016) observations that ideological manipulation is a common feature in audiovisual translation.

This study examines image portrayal to illuminate how media representations involve processes of selection, emphasis, and exclusion. Hall (1997) emphasizes that such representations are shaped by cultural and social contexts, which, in turn, influence audience interpretations. Here, the subtitled versions of Iranian films serve as constructed representations, where particular elements are either emphasized or omitted, shaping how Iranian society is perceived by non-Iranian audience. This selective encoding and attenuation significantly impact the construction of meaning and cultural identity for English-speaking viewers.

The findings of this study reveal that image-representative elements related to religious or legal mores were frequently omitted or attenuated, likely to avoid unfamiliar or polarizing topics for the target audience. In contrast, values with universal resonance were preserved, possibly to highlight similarities between the Self and the Other and to foster cross-cultural understanding. While these choices can facilitate accessibility to Iranian culture, they also risk diminishing cultural authenticity by erasing differences that contribute to cultural richness. This underscores the translator's complex role in shaping cultural representations, as decisions about selection and adaptation directly impact cross-cultural perceptions. As Doorslaer (2019) notes, translation choices are often influenced by national and cultural image-building, consciously or unconsciously. These findings also resonate with Tymoczko's (2003) view of the translator as an ethical agent of social change, where translation choices bridge cultural gaps by adjusting cultural disparities between source and target contexts.

This research was limited to the study of fansubtitles and did not encompass official subtitles, leaving room for further studies to compare the ideological underpinnings across different subtitling contexts. Additionally, since only verbal elements were analyzed, future research could explore how non-verbal cues contribute to cultural representation in subtitled media. Overall, the study reinforces the importance of cultural context in media translation and the translator's influential role in shaping cross-cultural communication through strategic representation of the Self in translation.

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