Audiovisual Translation and Media Accessibility in Iran: State of the Art

Amir Arsalan Zoraqi[1]* iD, Mohsen Askary[2], Azadeh Eriss[3],
Fatemeh Sarvghadi[4], Elmira Soleimanirad[5], Fatemeh Ghaderi[6]

Abstract

The increasing ubiquity and impact of audiovisual content has turned it into one of the primary objects of study in a number of disciplines in humanities, including Translation Studies. In the recent decade, audiovisual translation (AVT) has been a thriving research focus in many parts of the world. This article aims at mapping AVT in the context of Iran by reviewing the published Persian AVT research worldwide. The article is organized into two parts: the first part provides an overview of the main research articles, delineating the main research trends in AVT research in Iran. The second part presents and discusses research gaps and areas that merit further scholarly attention by academia. The article concludes that research on the topic in Iran is still in a fairly early stage, with the studies focusing mainly on the dubbing and subtitling of audiovisual products. Particularly, accessibility research in the context of (non-)interactive audiovisual products is yet to attract focused attention. Certain areas are highlighted and recommended for future research.

Keywords: audiovisual translation, dubbing, subtitling, voice-over, localization

[1] Corresponding Author: PhD in Translation Studies, Department of English, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran; *Email: amir.zoraqi@gmail.com*; ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8057-7050
[2] PhD Candidate in Translation Studies, Department of English, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran; *Email: mohsenaskary@mail.um.ac.ir*
[3] PhD Student, Translation Research and Instruction Program (TRIP), Binghamton University (State University of New York), USA; *Email:azadeh_eriss@yahoo.com*
[4] PhD Candidate in Translation Studies, Department of English, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran; *Email: sarvghadi.fa@mail.um.ac.ir*
[5] PhD Candidate in Translation Studies, Department of English, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran *Email: elmira.soleymanirad@gmail.com*
[6] PhD Candidate in Translation Studies, Department of English, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran *Email:fatemeh.ghaderi1376@yahoo.com*

1. Introduction

Thanks to the rapid development of technology worldwide, audiovisual products have turned into one of the main channels for intercultural communication and mediation. The increasingly broad access to the Internet has also contributed to the availability of a myriad of services and programs offering multilingual audiovisual content. The advent of streaming services and video-on-demand (VOD) platforms has accelerated the proliferation of audiovisual programs. Thus, the need to study translation activity in audiovisual products is higher than ever (Bogucki & Díaz-Cintas, 2020).

Audiovisual translation (AVT) is a nascent sub-discipline of Translation Studies that is largely concerned with the translation of multimedia products (Gambier, 2013), which has been moving to the center of discussions in Translation Studies in recent decades. This is reflected in the number of publications on the topic, which is exponentially on the rise (Orero, 2005). The number of specialized research groups, academic journals, and conferences dedicated to the subject on a global scale is also suggestive of further consolidation of this sub-discipline. The scope of AVT research encompasses areas such as dubbing, subtitling, and voice-over. It is also starting to cover such traditionally overlooked areas as game localization, in addition to modes of accessibility such as audio-description (AD) and subtitling for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing (SDH). Along the same vein, interest and focus on AVT in Iran is on the rise, and the body of research on the topic is growing.

Although there is still no specialized degree program at any level on AVT in Iranian universities, through the focused endeavors of a research group based at the Department of English at the Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, since a decade ago, the body of scholarly peer-reviewed published research on dubbing, subtitling, voice-over, localization, SDH and AD in the Persian context has visibly grown — providing numerous pieces of the puzzle — and has put AVT on the map in the Iranian humanities and social sciences academia. The coursework of the M.A. and PhD programs in Translation Studies at the Department also recently offers several courses on AVT. Scattered research by other scholars in Iranian universities has also increased and more theses have been conducted on various topics in media localization and translation.

Despite the one-decade success story, Iran's AVT academic investigation remains fragmented, with an imbalanced focus on the many related modalities and dimensions. So, it is of great importance to keep track of the growing number of studies that have been conducted in this area and identify the existing research gaps, prioritize challenges, and identify opportunities for more collaborations between academia and industry. The article attempts to sketch the map of AVT studies in Iran. As a traditionally dubbing country, the study begins with a general survey of research on dubbing, highlighting the different aspects of professional dubbing as well as non-professional dubbing. Then, an overview of voice-over research and the studies conducted on the localization of video games are presented. Furthermore, subtitling research is addressed, outlining the studies conducted on the specificities of non-professional and quasi-professional subtitling, followed by an overview of accessibility research, including research on SDH and AD so as to produce a panoramic view of AVT in Iran. Gaps and recommendations for prospective studies are discussed and offered in the following.

## 2. Literature Review

2.1. Dubbing

Compared to other modes of audiovisual translation, dubbing has a rather long tradition in Iran and has been the primary channel through which audiovisual products have been localized into the Persian language and culture. The mid-1940s saw the emergence of the very first instance of dubbing audiovisual fiction into Persian, which had been produced in Turkey (Zhirafar, 2014). This initial instance witnessed a huge success, and as a result, the pace of dubbing audiovisual products began to pick up, and dubbing gained a foothold in the context of Iran as the primary mode of localizing foreign films.

Given the long-standing tradition of dubbing in the context of Iran, dubbing activity in the Iranian audiovisual sphere has been prolific. This proliferation of dubbing activity, especially due to the participation of fans in the dubbing of audiovisual products, has led to the emergence of different types of dubbing. In an effort to capture the various types of dubbing activity in Iran, Nord et al. (2015)

illustrated a map of dubbing typology in Iran. Technology has played a pivotal role in the development of the AVT profession. Therefore, rapid and profound changes are being constantly made in audiovisual translation (Díaz Cintas & Massidda, 2019). In other words, audiovisual products and the AVT profession are characterized by significant dynamicity. This dynamicity can be observed in all modalities of audiovisual translation, including dubbing. Thus, in order to capture the latest changes made in the dubbing landscape in Iran, Khoshsaligheh (2022) revised and presented an updated version of the map based on the most recent developments in Persian dubbing practices (see Figure 1). As Figure 1 suggests, dubbing research can be divided into professional, quasi-professional, and non-professional dubbing, which have been, for the most part, descriptive and experimental. To date, dubbing remains the more investigated modality among Persian AVT research, while several modalities, like surtitling or respeaking, are non-existent topics both in the academic and professional domains.

Figure 1
Dubbing Typology in the Iranian Mediascape (Khoshsaligheh, 2022)
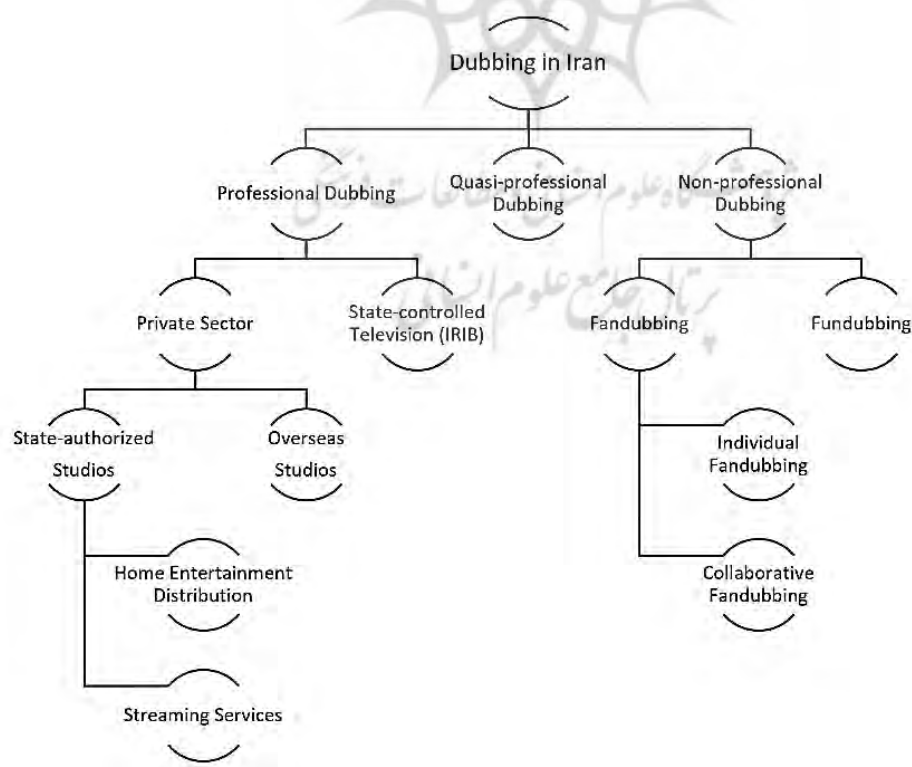
2.1.1. Professional dubbing

Professional dubbing has been the focus of a plethora of AVT publications in Iran. Therefore, given the large number of publications in this area, the body of research can be classified under four areas: characteristics, reception, censorship, socio-cultural issues, and psychological considerations. The studies conducted on the characteristics of dubbing can be further sorted into four sub-categories: the selection of voice actors, song dubbing, translation of graphic codes, and translation of allusions and humor.

Imani and Khoshsaligheh (2022) worked towards classifying the criteria for selecting voice actors and revealing the strategies of accent reproduction. In a follow-up study, Imani and Khoshsaligheh (2021) focused on the auditory channel of dubbed products and the effect of this channel on the quality of dubbing, the proper meaning transfer, and the establishment of communication with the intended audience. Along similar lines, Khoshsaligheh et al. (2021) carried out a piece of research with the aim of identifying the criteria based on which films are selected for dubbing on video-on-demand (VOD) platforms and the yardsticks for the selection of dubbing actors and dubbing studios. Furthermore, they sought to analyze the quality of a selection of French and English feature films dubbed into Persian in the light of the most frequent translation strategies resorted to. It was found that replacement, reduction, addition, translation errors, idiomatic translation, paraphrasing, and pronunciation errors were most noticeable with respect to Persian dubbing. In the most recent work, which falls under this sub-category, Khoshsaligheh et al. (2023) used Constructive Narrative Theory as a theoretical framework to investigate 'replotting' and 'recharacterization' as strategies for re-narration in Persian dubbed foreign fictions with the hope of contributing to the clarification of the politics of official dubbing and translation in broadcasting in Iran.

Considering song translation, Khoshsaligheh and Ameri (2016a) merged the models of Low (2003, 2005, 2008) and Franzon (2008) to adapt it for analyzing song dubbing by adding the two components of pre-existing music, and lip-synchronization. This model was also adopted by Mohammad Alizadeh (2019) in the examination of 11 dubbed animated films. In another study, Khoshsaligheh and

Mohammad Alizadeh (2019) concentrated on the singability of translated lyrics in relation to the pre-existing music based on Franzon's model (2008). Along similar lines, Khoshsaligheh, Sarvghadi, et al. (2022) integrated the models of Bosseaux (2015), Reus (2020), and Dyer (1998) to investigate the impact of song dubbing on singers' characterization in the case study of *Frozen* (2013).

With regard to graphic codes, Mehdizadkhani and Khoshsaligheh (2017) compared the strategies of voice-off and insertion as two methods for the rendition of graphic codes. In a follow-up study, Mehdizadkhani and Khoshsaligheh (2021) compared the efficiency of these two methods in terms of comprehension and information recall. In the area of allusion translation, Delnavaz and Khoshsaligheh (2020) examined translators' strategies for the translation of verbal allusions in the case study of the Persian dubbed version of Tarantino's films. Concerning the rendition of humor, Sadeghpour et al. (2015) investigated the strategies adopted in the translation of the colloquial, idiomatic, and humorous expressions in the cases of the Persian dubbed versions of five popular American comedy animations.

Compared to other domains, there is very little research on the reception of dubbed products and viewers' perception. The canon on this topic can be divided into four categories: 1) thematic studies; 2) experience and attitude studies; 3) perceptual studies; and 4) public reception and reception statistics (Ameri et al., 2015).

In the category of experience and attitude studies, two studies were published. The first one was conducted by Ameri et al. (2015), where they investigated the expectations of professional viewers of programs dubbed into Persian. The second one was that of Ameri and Khoshsaligheh (2018a), who examined Iranian audiences' views about the agents involved in dubbing translations. In the same vein, Ameri et al. (2018) ascertained the reception of dubbed products by investigating the viewers' perception of quality standards and the impacts of gender on dubbing reception. The issue of dubbing perception has also been studied using netnographic approaches. Ameri and Khoshsaligheh (2020) used netnography to explore a Persian-language online community considering dubbing in Iran and how Iranian dubbing audiences view Persian dubbing.

In the discussions on the reception of audiovisual products, censorship has been

considered one of the constant themes governing the quality of such products Ameri et al. (2018). As censorship has had a long history in Iran, Iranian researchers investigated the ideological interventions made in dubbed materials and, thus, significantly contributed to depicting the association between power and the media. Khoshsaligheh and Ameri (2014) studied the strategies that Iranian AV translators used for the translation of taboo language in American crime movies dubbed into Persian. In another study, Khoshsaligheh and Ameri (2016b) explored the role of all agents in adjusting the translated versions to the conventions and socio-cultural norms in dubbing, both for national television and private home distribution studios. They studied the impact of preliminary and operational norms and cultural appropriation at both textual and visual levels.

Gender portrayal constitutes another area that has been tackled rather sporadically by academia. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the Iranian cinema has turned into a conservative medium wherein the representation of the role of women has been controlled and restrained to adapt to Islamic ideologies (Khoshsaligheh, Eriss, et al., 2019). To abide by the norms of the target culture, AVT is prone to interference with the original. One of the studies addressing this issue was that of Khoshsaligheh, Eriss, et al. (2019) who examined the portrayal of women in a selection of dubbed films into Persian.

Other studies in which censorship was explored include Pakar et al. (2019), who classified film censorship in national media by examining the dubbed version of *The Godfather* trilogy. Pakar and Khoshsaligheh (2021) sought to explore manipulation and censorship in the Persian dubbing of a number of American feature films broadcast on Iranian national television to shed light on gatekeeping practices in recent years. In a more recent study, Pakar and Khoshsaligheh (2022) investigated censorship in the Persian dubbed version of the first four seasons of *House of Cards* (2013–2017) broadcast on the Iranian national television.

Concerning the socio-cultural issues, Alemzadeh and Khoshsaligheh (2020) scrutinized the effects of cultural and political issues of the time on media redubbing. On the side of the sociology of translators, Khoshsaligheh, Kafi, et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study to explore the identity, socioeconomic status, and

lifestyle of the translator character depicted in Iranian feature films.

With regards to the translation of multilingual films in Persian dubbing, Khoshsaligheh, Eriss, et al. (2022) analyzed how language variation is dealt with in the Persian dubbed versions of a selection of ten multilingual films. They found that, at the verbal level, the dubbed versions were mostly neutralized and that the signs of language variation in the original films were effaced. What is more, at the non-verbal level, adaptations were made to make the non-verbal signals and signs conform to the norms and expectations of the target culture.

As for psychological considerations, few studies have been conducted. Khoshsaligheh, Pishghadam, et al. (2018) analyzed the relationship between emotioncy, the emotions influencing viewers' interpretations, and dubbing words in the eyes of the viewers in the five professional dubbed versions of *Zootopia* (2016). The other articles worked on non-professional dubbing.

Having covered the body of research published on professional dubbing, the following section seeks to provide an overview of the studies conducted on non-professional dubbing in Iran.

2.1.2. Non-professional dubbing

Research conducted on non-professional dubbing in Iran has been scarce. Nord et al. (2015) attempted to draw a chart of the types of dubbing in Iran as "a catalyst" (p. 14) and a guide for further research on non-professional dubbing issues. As Figure 1 shows, non-professional dubbing can be divided into fandubbing and fundubbing (Khoshsaligheh, 2022). Although Nord et al. (2015) and Khoshsaligheh (2022) encourage Persian AVT researchers to further explore the variants of non-professional dubbing, recent researches on dubbing (e.g., Delnavaz & Khoshsaligheh, 2020; Khoshsaligheh & Ameri, 2016a; Khoshsaligheh & Mohammad Alizadeh, 2019; Khoshsaligheh, Sarvghadi, et al., 2022; Mehdizadkhani & Khoshsaligheh, 2017, 2021; Mohammad Alizadeh, 2019) are more involved with professional dubbing.

A single study explored unauthorized dubbing in Iran, examining synchronization and translation accuracy (Danaiefar et al., 2020). Although working on non-

professional dubbing, the paper did not specify the type of unauthorized dubbed versions based on the classification of Nord et al. (2015). Many topics of non-professional dubbing have still remained intact.

2.2. Voice-over

Although voice-over is widely used in the translation of audiovisual content in many countries (Matamala, 2019), it is still one of the lesser-studied AVT modalities in academia. The low cost of voice-over has turned it into one of the appealing options for the translation of some audiovisual products (Matamala, 2019), and Iran is no exception.

The literature specific to voice-over in Iran is recent. It has been only since the mid-2010s that scholars have focused on the specificities of voice-over translation (VOT). One of the first studies in this regard addressed the synchrony strategies in voiced-over documentaries into Persian (Khoshsaligheh & Ameri, 2016c). In her M.A. thesis, Rostami (2017) worked on the domestication and foreignization strategies of VOT in Iran. Ameri and Khoshsaligheh (2018b) focused on news translation in their voice-over study. Finally, the most recent study is that of Sanatifar and Tofeeq (2022), who investigated the fundamental factors of sound and image in the voiced-over versions of documentaries into Persian. It goes without saying that all these studies suffer from limitations such as small sample sizes and limitations in terms of the types of voiced-over content under investigation.

2.3. Game Localization

Research on the localization of video games in Iran has focused on both the professional and non-professional translation of this type of interactive audiovisual product. The body of research has been primarily concerned with the norms followed in the translation and the localization of in-game textual assets and the reception of video games localized into Persian. Furthermore, translation solutions constitute a recent trend in the body of research on the topic.

Focusing on the norms governing the localization of video games, Sheikh Bahai

and Mollanazar (2013) analyzed a corpus of 5000 text segments extracted from four video games localized into Persian. In another study using a case of an Iranian video game localized for English players, *Garshasp: Temple of the Dragon* (2012), Sharifi (2016) conducted a similar piece of research by analyzing the norms governing the localization of the said game.

Approaching the fan translation of video games, Khoshsaligheh and Ameri (2017) conducted a qualitative case study research on the fan translation of the cut-scenes of *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* (2016) in order to shed light on the motivations driving fan translators of video games to undertake such tasks, on the one hand, and the agency of fan translators, on the other.

Focusing on translators' agency, yet from a different perspective, Zoraqi and Kafi (2023) addressed the relationship between the interactive nature of video games and game translators' (in)visible agency. Upon textual analysis, it was found that video game translators had exerted visible agency to explain the inter- and intra-textual game references, aid comprehension, commentate on the content of video games, and reflect on and justify the employed translation strategies.

Shifting the focus of attention from the product to the final users, a number of studies have addressed how localized video games have been received in the Iranian context. One of the first studies to address the issue was that of Khoshsaligheh and Ameri (2020), who conducted a survey on the demographics, preferences, and consumption habits of video games in Iran. Moreover, gamers' perception of the condition of game localization in Iran was analyzed. Along similar lines, Afzali and Zahiri (2022) studied the translation needs of Iranian gamers and the in-game assets, which were considered necessary to be translated by the gamers.

Jooyaeian and Khoshsaligheh (2022) analyzed the translation solutions employed in the process of localizing video games into Persian. Furthermore, the localized video games were analyzed in terms of the level of localization adopted and also whether there were any ideological agendas behind the utilization of a particular translation solution. They also tried to identify translation errors and analyze whether the choice of a particular translation solution would give way to translation errors.

2.4. Subtitling

Despite the fact that Iran has traditionally been considered a dubbing country, the increasing demand for subtitled products has been synonymous with the formation of different types of subtitling practices and, consequently, different strands of research trying to capture them.
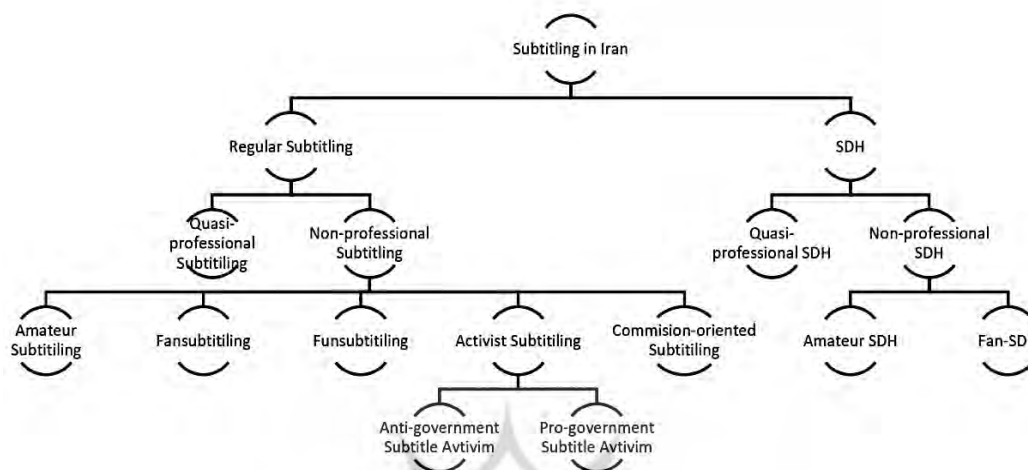
One of the research areas in subtitling is the study of translational issues in subtitles which can be applied to both regular subtitling and subtitling for the d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing (Khoshsaligheh et al., 2020). In this regard, Hejazi and Shirin (2020) examined how cultural elements are conveyed, how the translated cultural factors are perceived by the audience, and what the most commonly resorted to strategies are in order to obtain comprehensible translations. In the same vein, Athari Nikazm and Haji Abdollahi (2020) studied the translation quality of the subtitles of the Oscar-winning title *A Separation* (2011) from the perspective of Skopos theory.

Applying AVT to teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) is another area that has been a hot topic of research during recent years. For instance, a big project named TRADILEX[2] was formed in 2021 with the aim of using AVT as a didactic resource in foreign language education. This area has recently attracted the attention of the Iranian scholarly community as well. Rastegar Moghadam et al. (2020) considered teamwork as a prominent skill in subtitling practice and investigated the effects of a subtitling training course on students' attitudes toward teamwork skills.

In the past decade, attempts have been made to provide a map of AVT (e.g., Di Giovanni & Gambier, 2018) or to sketch AVT in a more limited and more context-specific scale (Khoshsaligheh, 2022; Nord et al., 2015). However, it was not until recently that a research team presented a typology for subtitling practices in Iran. Arguably, the most comprehensive study on subtitling practices in Iran is that of Khoshsaligheh et al. (2020), who set out to describe the status quo of subtitling into Persian and introduce a specific typology of these practices in the Iranian mediascape.

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[2] https://tradit.uned.es/en/proyecto-tradilex-2/

Figure 2

Subtitling Typology in the Iranian Mediascape (Khoshsaligheh et al., 2020)

According to Figure 2, one of the subsets of regular subtitling is non-professional subtitling, an emerging phenomenon in Iran that has been subject to minimal research and calls for further exploration.

Mardani and Khoshsaligheh (2023) aimed to investigate the attitudes of non-professional translators regarding ethical principles in translating English-language films into Persian. Not on a very different note, Ameri and Khoshsaligheh (2019) intended to fill the knowledge gap in the realm of non-professional subtitling by examining and analyzing the different practices closely related to Persian amateur subtitling. Among other researches which have been conducted in the field of non-professional subtitling in Iran, there are two prominent studies by Khoshsaligheh and Fazeli Haghpanah (2016) and Fazeli Haghpanah and Khoshsaligheh (2018). In the former, the authors tried to examine the process of producing non-professional subtitles for anime and other types of animation. The latter sought to study the reasons for the tendency of Iranian audiences to watch Korean films and TV series and to make fan-made subtitles for these audiovisual products. Translation of culture-specific items was not also left unnoticed when researching non-professional translation as Khoshsaligheh, Ameri, et al. (2018) explored the Persian translation of

the taboo language in English films subtitled by Iranian fansubbers.

Researchers in AVT have paid particular attention to the area of reception studies in recent years. In 2018 and 2019, one article each, and in 2021, two articles on the reception of AV translated products were published in Iran. Focusing on multimodal transcription as a method for subtitling reduction, Abdi and Khoshsaligheh (2018) explored the possibility of reducing the subtitles of the French language film *Amelie* (Jeunet, 2001), and investigated whether condensing subtitles affects the comprehension and the reception of Iranian viewers.

Given the rapid spread of audiovisual products and the fast pace with which products are being produced on a daily basis, fans might take it upon themselves to translate some of the products to help other users experience the products in the target language much earlier (Bold, 2012). Using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, Khoshsaligheh, Ameri, et al. (2019) attempted to explore the reception of non-professional subtitling into Persian by Iranian viewers. In a recent survey, Ameri and Khoshsaligheh (2021) conducted an experiment to examine whether a selected group of Iranian viewers might report different reception and immersion when watching a professionally versus a non-professionally subtitled audiovisual material. Another study focusing on the reception of younger audiences is that of Ameri and Khoshsaligheh (2022). This research was designed to investigate the reception of amateur subtitling in Iran.

With the advent of modern technologies, new tools have found their way into research in all fields, including AVT studies. One of these tools is eye-tracking devices which have enabled researchers to focus on the participants' gaze points. To examine and compare the eye movements of the participants while reading function and content words, in a quantitative experimental study using an eye-tracking device, Zahedi and Khoshsaligheh (2019) focused on participants' fixation duration, fixation number, first fixation duration, and skipping while reading a Persian subtitle of a sequence of a French-language film. In a recent study, Zahedi and Khoshsaligheh (2020) the effects of not observing zero-width spaces in Persian subtitles. Last but certainly not least is another recent study by Zahedi and Khoshsaligheh (2021), in which authors took issue with the findings of other studies that concluded that two-line subtitles receive more

attention than one-line subtitles.

2.5. Media Accessibility

2.5.1. Audio description

Audio description (AD), with the ultimate aim of helping people with visual impairment with accessing audiovisual content, has a fragmented landscape. It is in the early stages of development and expanded to include a wide range of settings, including film and television shows, as well as theatre, opera, museums, sports events, and art galleries (Fryer, 2010). The same is true for the case of Iran, as there is no sufficient evidence in the literature.

Despite the increasing attention to AVT in Iran, AD still remains underexplored. All published attempts in academia and industry are restricted to two research articles by Khoshsaligheh and Shafiei (2021) and Khoshsaligheh, Shokoohmand, et al. (2022). Khoshsaligheh and Shafiei (2021) investigated and described the current status of AD in Iran and reviewed the preparatory steps which were taken in this regard. The main sources of this research were online video distribution platforms, including Filimo, Gooshkon, and Sevina Group. Through analyzing the related documents and unstructured interviews with AD producers, it was found that AD service providers are divided into two main groups: (1) The Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB); and (2) non-government organizations (NGOs). Audio description is only available on radio platforms, but such is not the case for every program. Radio Tehran (2006), Radio Javan (2006), and Radio Namayesh (2012) are radio stations that provide AD services. NGOs include volunteer groups consisting of actors/actresses and blind audiences that are divided into Sevina Group and Independent Blinds Group.

It can be inferred that AD in Iran is still a new service that is rarely professionalized. To date, most of the studies available are related to movies and TV series accessibility. Moreover, the research on AD is only conducted in the department of translation. The investigation of audio-described content by the mentioned groups showed that the producers are not competent enough, as there are

neither specific guidelines nor academic training for this practice. As there are no national guidelines to regulate AD production in Iran, drawing upon ADLAB guidelines, Khoshsaligheh, Shokoohmand, et al. (2022), in a more practical piece of research, investigated the systematicity of the approach adopted in AD practices by Sevina Group. The article concludes that Sevina Group had adopted a fairly consistent approach. Despite certain inadequacies, the produced AD is a consistent and acceptable product, yet obviously there is room for much improvement.

2.5.2. Subtitling for the d/deaf and hard-of-hearing

The emergent discipline of media accessibility is a relatively recent development within AVT Studies. The practice and research of SDH bridge the two realms of subtitling and media accessibility. This area has also been the subject of a few research in the context of Iran. Shokoohmand and Khoshsaligheh (2019) delved into the status of media accessibility for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH), shedding light on this previously under-researched topic. In another research, Shokoohmand and Khoshsaligheh (2020) focused on the textual procedures followed in intralingual Persian subtitles. This study examined the quality of one of the intralingual subtitles for d/Deaf and hard of hearing made in Iran according to the existing standards to bring this type of subtitle closer to the needs of the DHH audience. The authors studied the textual solutions used in Persian subtitles by comparing the subtitle text with the main dialogues of the film and then compared these solutions with what is stated in the subtitle studies for DHH to clarify the differences.

3. Discussion

In order to gain an overview of the evolution of AVT research in Iran, this study drew primarily on articles published in top-tier academic journals and a number of influential works that were presented in (inter)national conferences on the subject. One of the main takeaways from the collected data is that research interest in the translation and localization of audiovisual products is increasing more than ever. This increased attention to these products can be attributed to the increased popularity of (non-)interactive audiovisual products among the Iranian audience. According to Filimo

(2020), a video-on-demand (VOD) service provider in Iran, more than 1.1 million active users were spending their time on the platform in 2020. The recent scholarly attention to the translation of audiovisual products can be considered a response to this surge of popularity among the public audience. However, research is still in its infancy, and there are numerous areas that are yet to be explored. Figure 3 summarizes the status quo of audiovisual translation research in Iran.

Figure 3
Map of Audiovisual Translation Research in Iran
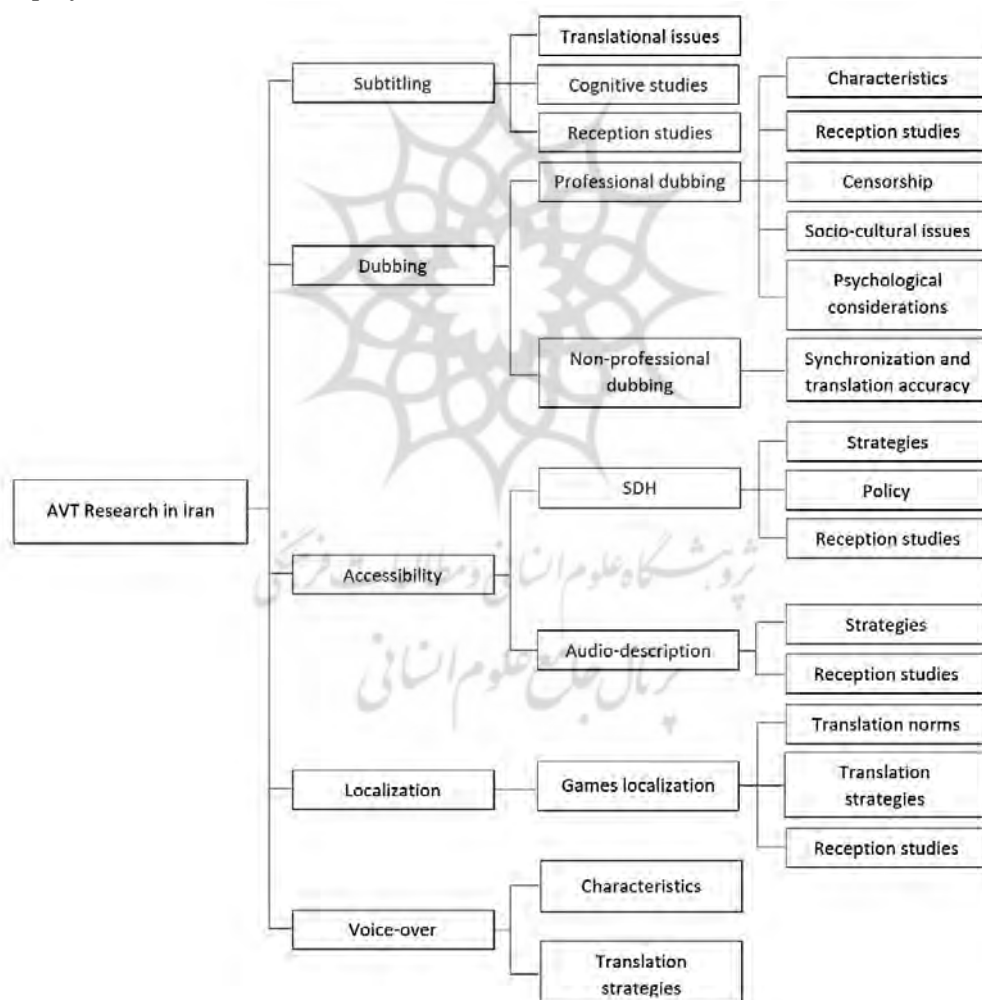
The most striking point with regard to Figure 3 is the unequal division of attention across the different audiovisual translation modalities. Given that Iran is predominantly a dubbing country, it should come as no surprise that one of the main areas that has been most delved into is dubbing. However, a point worth mentioning here is that, for the most part, research revolves around the study of professional dubbing. This could be explained by the consideration that the majority of dubbed audiovisual products are produced by TV and home entertainment distribution studios. As a result, professionally dubbed products are more accessible and influential for the audience. Therefore, professional dubbing seems to be more important for researchers compared to the products dubbed by non-professionals.

Subtitling constitutes the second major point of interest among Iranian academia. Subtitling reception studies and non-professional subtitling, each with four research publications, seem to be the most researched areas in this realm. The presented research overview indicates rather sporadic research focus, with studies seeking mostly to shed light on the practices and processes followed in the process of non-professional subtitling in Iran. The rather sporadic research on subtitling can be categorized as being initially focused on a specific issue (e.g., swear words, cultural references, and allusions), case studies, and reception studies. This is somehow comparable to the line of development that Gambier (2008) offers concerning early subtitling research on an international scale.

The lesser-developed areas have to do with the localization of video games, voice-over, and accessibility, respectively. Research on the localization of video games in Iran is still in an early stage, and the publication trend, both on a global scale and within Iran, is indicative of a growing interest in this booming yet underexplored field of research within AVT Studies. Part of this growing interest can be due to the fact that the research on other areas of AVT in the Iranian context is gaining momentum; therefore, research on video games, as multimedia and multimodal interactive audiovisual products, can benefit from the insights gained from the research conducted on other non-interactive audiovisual products. What is noteworthy regarding the body of research on game localization is that, in some cases, the interactivity of video games was ignored, and they were treated as non-interactive

audiovisual products. The existing research revolved mainly around the norms governing the localization of video games, with a few studies addressing the translation strategies adopted in the process of translation and the reception of these products. In short, the research is quite inchoate, and further research need to be carried out in order to provide more in-depth views and knowledge regarding this already nascent area of study.

Accessibility research and voice-over are two of the latest areas that were suggested to attract the attention of academic circles in Iran. The body of research carried out so far has focused on synchronization in documentaries with three articles in the realm of voice-over, a short review on the status of AD, and an investigation on one of the audio description groups with two articles in the domain of AD and only two publications on SDH.

4. The less Beaten Tracks

Compared to the body of research published in other locales, research on (non-)interactive audiovisual products in Iran is anything but comprehensive and well-established. This can easily be reflected by the fact that searching "audiovisual translation" in Bitra's [3] database, a bibliographical database on translation and interpreting research, would produce more than four thousand entries at the time of conducting the research (May 2022) while the number of publications in the context of Iran is tantamount to approximately sixty. This indicates numerous research gaps that need to be filled with regard to AVT research in Iran.

AVT research can benefit greatly from moving beyond the predominantly descriptive and comparative nature of the study. Reception studies would provide a useful framework for gaining insights into how different audiences receive audiovisual products. The necessity of this kind of research is felt in all audiovisual modalities, including dubbing, subtitling, accessibility, voice-over, and game localization. Technology can play a pivotal role in deepening our knowledge of the reception of audiovisual products. In fact, research using such technological devices

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[3] https://aplicacionesua.cpd.ua.es/tra_int/usu/buscar.asp?idioma=es

as eye trackers are extremely limited. Thus, more empirical studies need to make use of technological instruments. Even the replication of already existing studies using a larger sample size can be quite valuable to ensure both the validity and reliability of the existing data.

One of the useful applications of the findings of reception studies lies in the development of professional guidelines and best practices for going about the task of translation and localization. Therefore, one fertile research ground is seeking to develop guidelines for all types of audiovisual translation. Indeed, developing practical guidelines for dubbing, subtitling, and localizing audiovisual products can contribute significantly to the improvement of the quality of audiovisual products, which is yet another area that is underexplored and merits further attention.

Given the unique nature of different audiovisual modalities, some ad-hoc recommendations can also be made with regard to each modality. In the case of dubbing, the research can draw more on the fields of psychology and cognition. Furthermore, research on non-professional dubbing can benefit from studies focused on the socio-cultural aspects of dubbed products, and more research can also be conducted on the issues such as the transfer of humor, euphemism, irony, and the like.

The same can be said for voice-over translation. This area can also be further explored in terms of conceptual discussions that could form the theoretical basis upon which future research can be based. These discussions need to focus more on the challenges involved in voice-over translation and also how the working conditions of voice-over translators compared to those of translators in other areas of translation studies, in general, and audiovisual translation, in particular.

A glimpse at the map of subtitling in Iran would suggest that there are five sub-branches stemming from non-professional subtitling Khoshsaligheh et al. (2020); of those five, only two, i.e., amateur subtitling and fansubtitling, have individually been subjects of research, leaving the other three sub-branches as fertile grounds for future research. On the other hand, there are still huge gaps in areas like quasi-professional subtitling in Iran. It goes without saying that a research project with the aim of defining professional subtitling criteria for the Iranian context has long been awaiting

the attention of AVT scholars and would definitely pave the way for an enormous body of research in the years ahead.

Accessibility research forms yet another underexplored area of study for both interactive and non-interactive audiovisual products. Regarding audio description, research can be expanded to embrace a wide range of settings in modern society in areas where audiovisual products play a role. Furthermore, more insights need to be gained on the differences involved in describing TV, movies, theatres, and museums, to name but a few. More studies need to focus on testing consumers' comprehension, seeking their opinions, and even engaging them in creating and revising the services. Another area that should not be neglected is that of recorded or live description, which can also be subject to research along with research on subtitling for the d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing.

Another area that is in desperate need of further scholarly attention is game localization. More research needs to be carried out drawing on the interactive aspects of video games and how the localization process affects players' gameplay experience. Given that a wealth of information on video games is published on forums, specialized blogs, and websites, further netnographic discussions can be made regarding video games. The localization of mobile games is yet another widely underexplored area of study that needs to be further explored. Further conceptualizations are necessary to shed light on the particularities and challenges involved in the localization of video games into Persian and what the features of the existing localized video games into Persian are, both with regard to console/PC games and mobile games.

Coming up with best practices for the dubbing and subtitling of video games would contribute significantly to increasing the quality of game localization. Further sociological studies need to be carried out to enrich the limited knowledge on such aspects as translators' agency and motivation in the context of video games. Game accessibility is also left unexplored in the context of Iran and merits further attention. Last but not least lies the area of web localization, the research on which is scant, and more attention should be devoted to this prevalent phenomenon.

In the end, the same as many parts of the world—except for Europe, AVT, media

localization and accessibility in Iran are substantially under-researched, especially from cognitive perspectives and audience wants and needs. Therefore, any quality research based on robust mixed-methods designs would be valuable additions to the current body of knowledge and could substantially contribute to completing the pieces of the puzzle and, consequently, improve the quality of professional practice and services, on the one hand, and help achieve a sustainable AVT profession in the translation market of Iran, on the other.

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About the Authors

Amir Arsalan Zoraqi, PhD in Translation Studies, Department of English, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran, *Email: amir.zoraqi@gmail.com*

Mohsen Askary, PhD Candidate in Translation Studies, Department of English, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran, *Email:* mohsenaskary@mail.um.ac.ir

Azadeh Eriss, PhD Student, Translation Research and Instruction Program (TRIP), Binghamton University (State University of New York), USA, *Email: azadeh_eriss@yahoo.com*

Fatemeh Sarvghadi, PhD Candidate in Translation Studies, Department of English, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran, *Email: sarvghadi.fa@mail.um.ac.ir*

Elmira Soleimanirad, PhD Candidate in Translation Studies, Department of English, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran, *Email: elmira.soleymanirad@gmail.com*

Fatemeh Ghaderi, PhD Candidate in Translation Studies, Department of English, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran, *Email: fatemeh.ghaderi1376@yahoo.com*