

A Microhistorical Study of Book Title Translation in Franklin Publishing House in Tehran

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Abstract

Translating book titles requires fidelity to the source text and cultural adaptation. Franklin Publishing House (FPH), active in Iran between 1954 and 1976, played a key role in shaping translation norms. This study investigates the translation strategies applied to book titles published by FPH during this period, using a microhistorical approach. A corpus of 790 translated titles from diverse genres was compiled through archival research in the Princeton University Library, the Library of Congress, the National Library of Iran, and other Iranian repositories. Titles were classified by genre and analyzed according to Yin's (2009) framework, which distinguishes source-oriented strategies (literal translation, transliteration, and explication) from target-oriented strategies (adaptation, new title). Frequencies and percentages were calculated for each category. Literal translation was the most frequent strategy, while explication was the least common. Genre-specific patterns revealed a predominance of literal translation across most categories, particularly in historical and pure science titles. FPH's predominant use of literal translation reflects its commitment to preserving source-text identity, a practice that aligned with its Cold War cultural diplomacy objectives and influenced translation norms within Iran's publishing industry.

Keywords: microhistory, Franklin Publishing House, book title translation, translation strategies, cultural diplomacy

Citation: Sanjarani, A., Torabi, Z., & Ghodrat, N. (2026). A microhistorical study of book title translation in Franklin Publishing House in Tehran. *Applications of Language Studies*, 4(1), 38–56. <https://doi.org/10.22034/jals.2025.2070923.1104>

Received: 2025-09-05

Revised: 2025-11-21

Accepted: 2026-01-18

Published online: 2026-01-26

P-ISSN: 2588-6975

E-ISSN: 2588-6983

Article type: Research Paper

DOI: 10.22034/jals.2025.2070923.1104



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1. Introduction

Translating book titles is a complex task that requires balancing semantic fidelity, cultural sensitivity, and market appeal. Titles function not only as identifiers of a work but also as marketing tools, ideological markers, and cultural signifiers (Genette, 1997; Grivel, 1973). For publishers, the choice of translation strategy can influence both readership reception and the cultural positioning of the work in the target context. In historical translation studies, title translation has received comparatively little attention, particularly in the Iranian context, where research has tended to focus on the translation of full texts or on macro-level trends in publishing history. This gap is notable given that titles, as paratexts, often encapsulate key ideological and commercial considerations (Nord, 1995; Viezzi, 2011).

Franklin Publishing House (FPH), active in Iran from 1954 to 1976, played a pivotal role in shaping translation norms during a period of rapid modernization and growing foreign cultural influence. Sponsored by U.S. institutions, FPH operated at the intersection of publishing, education, and Cold War cultural diplomacy. While previous studies examined its broader publishing activities and political role (Farahzad & Sanjarani, 2023; Laugesen, 2017), none have investigated how its title translation strategies reflected and reinforced its institutional objectives.

This study addresses that gap through a microhistorical analysis of 790 book titles translated and published by FPH. Microhistory, with its focus on small-scale, detailed investigation of specific cases, offers an effective lens for uncovering the connections between translation practice, institutional policy, and geopolitical context (Ginzburg & Poni, 1991). By concentrating on a single paratextual element —book titles— within a clearly defined corpus, the research provides a fine-grained account of how translation strategies were deployed to serve both linguistic and ideological aims. Specifically, the study aims to: 1) identify the most and least frequently used translation strategies across different genres of FPH publications, 2) examine genre-specific variations in strategy use, and 3) interpret these patterns in relation to FPH's cultural and political positioning in mid-20th-century Iran. By situating these findings within both Iranian translation history and the broader literature on titology, this research contributes to understanding how seemingly minor translation decisions can reflect and

reinforce larger cultural and political agendas. It also demonstrates the potential of archival microhistory as a methodological approach in historical translation studies. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How did the selection of translation strategies vary across genres and throughout the corpus?

RQ2: What do these strategies reveal about the normative practices of the studied period?

2. Review of the Related Literature

Over the past thirty years, there has been an increasing scholarly focus on the historical aspects of translation studies. A growing body of translation scholars, including Pym (1998), D'hulst (2001), Bastin and Bandia (2006), and O'Sullivan (2012), argue for the recognition of historical translation studies as a distinct subfield within the broader discipline of translation studies. History's academic rigor derives from systematic, objective investigation of the past. Central to this endeavor is the historian's dual mandate: 1) unbiased documentation of factual narratives, and 2) accurate reconstruction of event sequences (Padmanabhan, 2014). As Wakabayashi puts forward (2019), the field of translation history primarily relies on textual sources rather than event-based ones. As a result, electronic resources and tools can prove advantageous in this area of study. The effective integration of data and interdisciplinary exchange relies on the judicious, diligent, and attentive utilization of these tools. In essence, the efficacy of quantitative approaches in historical research hinges on the outcomes they enable, given that their application in isolation does not suffice for producing high-quality historical accounts.

According to Adamo (2006), the fundamental aim of microhistory is to retrieve the perspectives of individuals who have been marginalized, utilizing fragmented and seemingly insignificant evidence (p. 93). Microhistory presents several challenges and implications for the study of history. These include defining the object of study in terms of novelty, fragmentariness, and transgression; recognizing the potential otherness of the past beyond its utility for present-day investigation; acknowledging the problematic nature of sources and

archives; and being cognizant of the narrative dimension of historical writing (Adamo, 2006). Microhistorians operate on hermeneutic principles, recognizing all primary sources as polysemic texts demanding critical exegesis rather than transparent reading. It is unthinkable that a source could shed light on an event or phenomenon without first going through the hands of a researcher, such as a historian or other scholar (Munslow, 1997). Analogous to detectives solving crimes or doctors diagnosing hidden pathologies, microhistorians examine minute evidentiary traces while discounting universal behavioral assumptions (Szijártó, 2016). Munday (2014) argues that personal papers, manuscripts, archives, and other forms of testimony pertaining to the history of translators are not being fully utilized in translation studies research. However, these resources are invaluable for investigating the condition, working practice, and identity of translators, as well as the interaction between translators and other participants involved in the translation process.

Highlighting the importance of microhistorical research for translation studies scholars, Atefmehr and Farahzad (2021a) conducted a microscopic investigation to propose a tentative method as a guide for translation studies scholars conducting microhistorical research in the Iranian context. Through mixing Ginsburg's 'method of clue' and the archival method, a three-step, non-linear method was developed which involved selecting the topic of interest, conducting an archival search, establishing a micro-macro relationship, and writing a narrative.

Small-scale historical research is vital since it allows us to recover the hidden facts and to remember the forgotten voices. As such, Atefmehr and Farahzad (2021b) conducted a microhistorical study to examine the archives of the first translators of *Dār al-Funûn* in the Nāseri era (1848-1896). Through examining the document repositories of five archives in detail and extracting the information from primary sources, they were able to illustrate the unseen aspects of the life and work of the first translators of *Dār al-Funûn*.

In addition, through a microhistorical investigation, Adili and Farahzad (2019) traced the role of translation in the Qājār period, starting from the movement's initiation in 1807 to the proclamation of the Iranian Constitution in 1906. Employing Farahzad's model of intertextuality in translation, they extracted a list of different kinds of newspapers as well as the translated volumes published in the Qājār period from 1870 to 1906. Thus, they found that

the fundamental changes in different social, cultural, and political aspects in Iran were the translation movement, which acted as a catalyst of that time and led the country to the Constitutional Revolution.

By employing an archival microhistory, Farahzad and Sanjarani (2023) examined the translation activities of FPH from 1954 to 1976 to construct a comprehensive picture of its translation activities in Iran. They concluded that FPH was a pivotal non-state actor in Iran's cultural history, fundamentally reshaping translation norms, publishing infrastructure, and knowledge consumption for decades. Its activities underscore how translation can be strategically deployed as an instrument of foreign policy and cultural hegemony within specific geopolitical contexts.

FPH was revealing its global ambition as if it sought to establish a professional model for translation and publishing in countries around the globe. Smith (1952) commented that "everywhere I go, there are theoretical FPH possibilities, and if we were empire builders, it would not be at all hard to justify our jumping" (p. 62).

Laugesen (2017) points out that Franklin participated in cultural Cold War endeavours in the United States with the intention of achieving American imperialistic goals. The imperialistic dimensions and aspirations were approached with both subtle and complex strategies, as well as overt and interventionist tactics. Nevertheless, it was consistently demonstrated in a way that illustrated the utilization of soft power. Arrabai (2019) conducted a study on FBP, which analyzed the U.S. government's auto-image construction through the translation of its books into the languages of countries where Franklin was active. The United States of America endeavored to address unfavorable perceptions of its image, which included allegations of imperialism, materialism, and atheism disseminated by diverse factions, such as communists, Arab nationalists, and leftist and Islamic intellectuals.

Titles are shown as significant structures that play a crucial part in the organization of a cultural product. Over the past four decades, the titles assigned to texts, photographs, and objects have been the topic of intermittent but consistent critical inquiry. However, as Gibbons (2008) explicitly acknowledges, titles continue to be marginal or mostly neglected parts of reading experiences and literary studies. Hoek (1973) was the first scholar to develop the term

“Tit(r) ology” to describe the academic study of titles (later on, Titleology). Genette (1997) provides a systematic account of paratexts and a functional description of titles.

Post-foundational publications, the field attracted significant scholarly attention with pioneering studies by Hollander (1975), Kellman (1975), Levin (1977), Fisher (1984), and Adams (1987). Subsequent research diversified methodologically while maintaining core foci on title functionality (Grivel, 1973; Viezzi, 2004; Virbel, 1989) versus formal properties (Biacchi, 2004; Hartley, 2007; Soler, 2011). Specialized analytical paradigms emerged from these distinct research priorities.

Titles constitute the formal nomenclature of cultural artefacts (e.g., literary works, musical compositions, and cinematic productions), serving dual purposes: conveying essential information and establishing unique identity (Viezzi, 2011). As Viezzi (2011) argues, “titles may be regarded as a genre, with specific defining features” (p. 183). One definition of a title’s nature is that it is a symbol representing the text or the product. Zanettin (2019) views the title as a linguistic indicator that conveys both verbal and nonverbal information.

According to Nord (1995), the best way to approach the translation of titles is a functional one. Functionalist frameworks conceptualize translation fundamentally as a communicative act, where meaning derives from contextual function. More precisely, these approaches position translation as a purposeful transcultural activity wherein the linguistic form of the target text is determined by its intended purpose. In title translation, Newmark (1988) distinguishes *descriptive titles* (explicitly thematic) from *allusive titles* (metaphorically linked). He contends translated titles must maintain referential ties to the source for identification while achieving cultural salience through allusive attractiveness (p. 57).

Yin (2009) attributes title translation success to cultural resonance, arguing culture structures audience cognition and expectations. His film title analysis prioritizes either source-text transparency (via literal/explicative/translative methods) or target-culture receptivity (through adaptation/original titles accommodating cultural and paratextual factors). Viezzi (2013) identifies literal translation defined as “accurate reformulation of the source title’s semantic content” as a dominant cross-linguistic strategy (p. 379). Contrastively, he examines

adaptive substitution: replacing source titles with culturally autonomous target-language titles governed by textual substance and target-reader expectations.

2.1. Theoretical framework

Yin (2009) categorizes title translation strategies into two overarching groups: original-title-respecting techniques and original-title-discarding techniques. The former group includes literal translation, which directly renders the source title's meaning; transliteration, which reproduces the phonetic form of the source title; and explication, which provides explanatory or contextual information to clarify the original meaning. The latter group encompasses adaptation, involving cultural or stylistic adjustments to suit the target audience, and new title, in which the original is replaced entirely with an unrelated expression in the target language (p. 171).

3. Methodology

The study examined 790 book titles translated and published by FPH in Iran between 1954 and 1976. Data were collected through documentary and archival research using primary sources from the Princeton University Library, the Library of Congress, the National Library of Iran, the Elmi Farhangi Institution, and the Organization of Libraries, Museums, and Documents of Astane Quds Razavi. Through online searches, the researcher found that the Franklin Book Programs Records, 1952-1977, were donated to the Princeton University Library in 1978. Some contents related to the Tehran office were online, and they were downloaded and carefully investigated. For those documents that were not online, the researcher contacted the librarian to digitalize the content. Titles were categorized into ten genres (General Works, Philosophy, Social Sciences, Pure Sciences, Technology, Art, Literature, History, Iranology, and Religion) based on catalogue records (Smith, 1952). While other typologies of title translation exist, such as Nord's (1995) functionalist approach or Newmark's (1988) descriptive/allusive distinction, Yin's (2009) framework was selected for this study due to its suitability for large-scale, archival data. Yin's (2009) model offers five clearly defined, mutually exclusive strategy categories organized under a source-oriented/target-oriented dichotomy. These categories are directly observable in the final published titles, enabling reliable coder agreement and facilitating quantitative analysis. Moreover, Yin's source/target

orientation provides a clear analytical link between micro-level translation decisions and macro-level institutional or ideological patterns, which is essential for assessing FPH's cultural and political role during the period studied. Then, based on the above theoretical framework provided by Yin (2009), the translation strategies used in the translation of the books titles were extracted and statistically analyzed to obtain their number and frequency in the corpus.

4. Results and Discussion

This section addresses the research questions through systematic analysis of all book titles (n = 790). Each title was categorized according to Yin's (2009) binary translation framework: source-oriented approaches (transliteration, literal translation, explication) preserving original title integrity, or target-oriented approaches (adaptation, new titles) discarding the source. The resulting categorical frequencies, alongside genre distributions published by FPH, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of FPH Translated Books by Genre (1954–1976)

No.	Text Typology	Number	Frequency
1	General work	3	0.37%
2	Philosophy	68	8.60%
3	Social science	104	13.16%
4	Pure science	155	19.62%
5	Technology	75	9.49%
6	Art	13	1.64%
7	Literature	167	21.13%
8	History	175	22.15%
9	Iranology	17	2%

10	Religion	13	2.15%
Total		790	100%

Table 1 shows the number and frequency of each genre published by and in FPH. As the table indicates, most of the books published by and in FPH were historical, with a total of 175 books. The literature genre, on the other hand, ranks second with a total of 167 books. With three books, general work is the lowest-numbered genre. The genres between these two extremes are: literature (167), pure science (155), social science (104), technology (75), philosophy (68), Iranology (17), art (13), and religion (13) (Farahzad & Sanjarani, 2023).

Table 2

Translation Strategies in Literary Titles

Strategy	Transliteration	Literal Translation	Explication	Adaptation	Providing a new title
Number	15	86	8	38	20

According to Table 2, the most frequently used strategy in the translation of literary book titles is Literal Translation in 86 titles, and the least used strategy is Explication in 8 titles. Other strategies used between the most and least are adaptation in 38 titles, providing a new title in 20 titles, and transliteration in 15 titles. Instances include translating book titles such as *Human Comedy* into کمدی انسانی as a literal translation. *Bridge of ST* into پل مرگ as adaptation, *The Clown* into عقاید یک دلقک as explication, *Pinocchio* into پینوکیو as transliteration, and *The Magic of OZ* into بازگشت به شهر زمرد as providing a new title.

Table 3

Translation Strategies in Philosophical Titles

Strategy	Transliteration	Literal translation	Explication	Adaptation	Providing a new title
Number	0	41	5	17	5

According to Table 3, the most frequently used strategy in the translation of philosophy book titles is Literal Translation in 41 titles, and the least used strategy is Transliteration (zero). Other strategies used between the most and least are Adaptation in 17 titles, providing a new title in 5 titles, and Explication in 5 titles. Instances include translating book titles such as *The Story of Philosophy* into تاریخ فلسفه as a literal translation. *In Search of Self* into شناخت خویشتن as adaptation, *Essays Into Psychology* into مقالات روانشناسی as explication and *Love against Hate* into اعجاز روانکاوی as providing a new title.

Table 4

Translation Strategies in Iranology Titles

Strategy	Transliteration	Literal translation	Explication	Adaptation	Providing a new title
Number	2	8	0	6	1

According to Table 4, the most frequently used strategy in the translation of Iranology book titles is Literal Translation in 8 titles, and the least used strategy is Explication in 1 title. Other strategies used between the most and least are Adaptation in 6 titles, Transliteration in 2 titles, and providing a new title in 1 title. Instances include translating book titles such as *Masterpiece of Persian Art* into شاهکارهای هنری ایران as a literal translation, *Order of the Assassins* into پل مرگ as adaptation, *Grass* into سفری به سرزمین دلاوران as explication, *Isfahan* into اصفهان as transliteration, and *Primer for Illiterate Adults in New Guinea* into قصه برای بزرگسالان as providing a new title.

Table 5

Translation Strategies in General Works Titles

Strategy	Transliteration	Literal translation	Explication	Adaptation	Providing a new title
Number	0	1	0	2	0

According to Table 5, the most frequently used strategy in the translation of General works book titles is Adaptation in 8 titles, and the least used strategies are Providing a new title, Explication and Transliteration (zero). Another strategy used between the most and least

is Literal translation in 1 title. Instances include translating book titles such as *Atlas of Islamic History Art* into اطلس تاریخ اسلامی as literal translation. *Golden Book Encyclopaedia*, 18 Volumes into فرهنگ نامه as adaptation.

Table 6

Translation Strategies in Art Titles

Strategy	Transliteration	Literal translation	Explication	Adaptation	Providing a new title
Number	1	3	0	5	4

According to Table 6, the most frequently used strategy in the translation of Art book titles is adaptation in 5 titles, and the least used strategy is explication in zero titles. Other strategies used between the most and least are providing a new title in 4 titles, literal translation in 3 titles, and transliteration in 1 title. Instances include translating book titles such as *Engineer Did It* into شاهکارهای مهندسی as adaptation, *Paradox Sur Le Comedienne* into هنرپیشه کیست as providing a new title, *Lust For Life* into شور زندگی as literal translation, *Leonardo Da Vinci* into لیوناردو داوینچی as transliteration.

Table 7

Translation Strategies in Historical Titles

Strategies	Transliteration	Literal Translation	Explication	Adaptation	Providing a new title
Numbers	34	83	21	25	12

According to Table 7, the most frequently used strategy in the translation of historical book titles is literal translation in 83 titles, and the least used strategy is providing a new title in 12 titles. Other strategies used between the most and least are Transliteration in 34 titles, Adaption in 25 titles, and Explication in 21 titles. Instances include translating book titles such as *Memoirs of a Minister* into خاطرات نخست وزیر as a literal translation, *Bukhara* into بخارا as transliteration, *The California Gold Rush* into جویندگان طلا as adaptation, *Sanat Naft Iran* into

as providing a new title, *Lives of Destiny* into بزرگ مردان تاریخ as explication, and *Why Children Misbehave* into چرا اطفال بدرفتار و بداخلاق بار می آیند as transliteration, and *Parents and Teachers as Partners* into خانه مدرسه و کودک as providing a new title, and *How Children Play for Fun and Learning* into بازی اطفال as explication.

Table 8

Translation Strategies in Social Sciences Titles

Strategies	Transliteration	Literal		Explication	Adaptation	Providing a new title
		Translation				
Numbers	0	67		11	0	26

According to Table 8, the most frequently used strategy in the translation of social science book titles is Literal Translation in 67 titles, and the least used strategies are Adaptation and Transliteration in zero titles. Other strategies used between the most and least are providing a new title in 26 titles and Explication in 11 titles. Instances include translating book titles such as *Why Children Misbehave* into چرا اطفال بدرفتار و بداخلاق بار می آیند as Literal translation, *Parents and Teachers as Partners* into خانه مدرسه و کودک as providing a new title, *How Children Play for Fun and Learning* into بازی اطفال as Explication.

Table 9

Translation Strategies in Religious Titles

Strategies	Transliteration	Literal		Explication	Adaptation	Providing a new title
		Translation				
Numbers	1	8		0	0	4

According to Table 9, the most frequently used strategy in the translation of religious book titles is literal translation in 8 titles, and the least used strategy is Adaptation and Explication in zero titles. Other strategies used between the most and least are providing a new title in 4 titles and transliteration in 1 title. Instances include translating book titles such as *The Wisdom of The Living Religion* into حکمت ادیان as providing a new title, *This is The Way* into راه این است as Literal translation, and *Martin Luther* into مارتن لوتر as transliteration.

According to Table 10, the most frequently used strategy in the translation of pure science book titles is Literal translation in 117 titles, and the least used strategy is Explication in zero titles. Other strategies used between the most and least are Adaptation in 27 titles, providing a new title in 8 titles, and Transliteration in 3 titles. Instances include translating book titles such as *Animals We Know* into حیواناتی که ما میشناسیم as a literal translation, *All About Whales* into غول دریا as adaptation, *The Story of Madame Curie* into مادام کوری as transliteration, and *All About The Sea* into عجایب دریا as providing a new title.

Table 10

Pure Sciences Titles

Strategy	Transliteration	Literal translation	Explication	Adaptation	Providing a new title
Number	3	117	0	27	8

Table 11

Translation Strategies in Technological Book Titles

Strategy	Transliteration	Literal translation	Explication	Adaptation	Providing a new title
Number	3	30	8	7	27

According to Table 11, the most frequently used strategy in the translation of technological book titles is Literal translation in 30 titles, and the least used strategy is Transliteration in 3 titles. Other strategies used between the most and least are Providing a new title in 27 titles, Explication in 8 titles, and Adaptation in 7 titles. Instances include translating book titles such as *Men Who Changed the World* into مردانی که دنیا را عوض کردند as a literal translation, *The Wright Brothers* into اختراع هواپیما as providing a new title, and *Feeds and Feeding* into غذا و تغذیه دام as explication. *Williams Obstetric* into ابستتی و زایمان as adaptation, and *Albert Schweitzer* into البرت شیوالنزر as transliteration.

Table 12 contains statistical information on the book title translation techniques in the translation of FPH's book titles. Literal translation (449) with 56.20% was the most frequently

used strategy and explication (53) with 6.70% was the least frequently used strategy in the translation of book titles in FPH.

Table 12

Overall Translation Strategies in FPH Titles (All Genres)

Translation strategy	Literal translation	Transliteration	Explication	Providing new title	Adaptation
Number	444	59	53	107	127
Frequency	56.20%	8.19%	6.70%	13.54%	16.07%

The analysis of 790 translated book titles published by FPH between 1954 and 1976 reveals a strong preference for literal translation (56.20%), with explication representing the least-used strategy (6.70%). This predominance of literal translation is consistent with findings by Farghal and Bazi (2017), who note that literal rendering is often favored when the source title carries cultural prestige or international recognition.

In the FPH context, this preference can be interpreted as a deliberate institutional policy. By preserving the exact semantic content of source titles, FPH maintained a direct link between its translated works and their American origins. This practice aligns with the organization's documented Cold War mission to promote U.S. cultural influence in Iran (Arrabai, 2019; Laugesen, 2017). The strategy also minimized the risk of political misinterpretation or ideological suspicion in a sensitive geopolitical climate, as literal titles were less likely to be seen as locally manipulated or propagandistic.

Genre-specific patterns indicate that literal translation dominated in history, literature, and pure sciences, while adaptation and new-title strategies appeared more frequently in art and technology, where cultural and marketing considerations may have demanded greater creativity. These variations suggest that while institutional policy shaped overall trends, genre conventions and audience expectations also influenced translators' choices.

This microhistorical analysis not only documents a key aspect of Iran's mid-20th-century translation landscape but also illustrates how title translation can serve as a site of negotiation between cultural diplomacy and local publishing norms. By situating these findings

within the broader history of translation in Iran (Atefmehr & Farahzad, 2021c; Farahzad & Adili, 2019), the study underscores the value of archival microhistory for revealing how seemingly minor translation decisions reflect larger ideological, institutional, and cultural dynamics.

5. Conclusion

This study examined translation strategies in 790 book titles published by FPH in Iran between 1954 and 1976. The results show that literal translation was the dominant strategy across genres, reflecting FPH's preference for preserving the semantic integrity and recognizability of source titles. This choice was not purely linguistic but was embedded in the organization's broader cultural and political objectives during the Cold War, aligning with its role in advancing U.S. soft power and shaping local publishing practices.

While literal translation served institutional goals of brand consistency and ideological neutrality, the occasional use of adaptation and new-title strategies, particularly in art and technology, illustrates the influence of genre conventions and market considerations. These findings demonstrate how title translation operates at the intersection of language policy, cultural diplomacy, and commercial publishing.

By applying a microhistorical lens, this study contributes to the historiography of translation in Iran, offering a detailed account of how one influential publishing house's strategies reflected—and helped construct—the cultural politics of its time. The approach used here can be adapted to investigate other historical periods, institutions, and translation domains, thereby enriching our understanding of translation's role in cultural history.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) certify/certifies that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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