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Lost in Title Translation: A Comparative Analysis of English-Persian Book Titles for Children and Adults

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Abstract

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Keywords:

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Communicative
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translation

The titles of translated books have a significant impact on their marketability, as they are among the first features perceived by potential readers. This study focuses on the strategic differences in the translation of book titles for children and adults, an under-researched area in translation studies. To this end, 100 English book titles for children and 100 English book titles for adults were selected, translated into Persian, and analyzed according to Newmark's communicative translation and semantic translation and Vinay and Darbelnet's (1994, 2004) model. The analysis shows that, according to Newmark, 74 children's book titles were translated using the communicative translation and 26 using the semantic translation. Of the book titles for adults, 75 were translated using semantic translation and 25 using communicative translation. The analysis of the titles based on Vinay and Darbelnet's model showed that the titles of the translated children's books were mostly rendered using a modulation process. In contrast, literal translation came first in the books for adults. The use of different procedures and approaches by Iranian translators shows that the translation of children's books requires different skills. The greater number of modulations in children's books compared to adult literature also shows more creativity to appeal to the younger audience. This study has implications for various bodies in the translation industry, including translators, translation educators, and policymakers for publishers in the translation market.

گم شدن در ترجمه عنوان: تحلیل تطبیقی عناوین کتاب‌های انگلیسی-فارسی برای کودکان و بزرگسالان
عناوین کتاب‌های ترجمه شده تأثیر قابل توجهی بر بازاریابی آن‌ها دارند، زیرا از اولین ویژگی‌هایی هستند که خوانندگان بالقوه با آن‌ها روبرو می‌شوند. این پژوهش بر تفاوت‌های راهبردی در ترجمه عناوین کتاب برای کودکان و بزرگسالان تمرکز دارد که زمینه‌ای کم بررسی‌شده در مطالعات ترجمه است. بدین منظور، ۱۰۰ عنوان کتاب انگلیسی برای کودکان و ۱۰۰ عنوان کتاب انگلیسی برای بزرگسالان انتخاب، به فارسی ترجمه و بر اساس ترجمه ارتباطی و ترجمه معنایی نیومارک و مدل وینای و داربلنت تحلیل شد. تحلیل نشان می‌دهد که بر اساس نیومارک، ۷۴ عنوان کتاب کودک با استفاده از ترجمه ارتباطی و ۲۶ عنوان با استفاده از ترجمه معنایی ترجمه شده‌اند. از عناوین کتاب‌های بزرگسالان، ۷۵ عنوان با استفاده از ترجمه معنایی و عنوان با استفاده از ترجمه ارتباطی ترجمه شده‌اند. تحلیل عناوین بر اساس مدل وینای و داربلنت نشان داد که عناوین کتاب‌های کودکان بیشتر با استفاده از فرایند تعدیل ترجمه شده است. در مقابل، ترجمه تحت‌اللفظی در کتاب‌های بزرگسالان در رتبه اول قرار گرفت. استفاده از روش‌ها و رویکردهای مختلف توسط مترجمان ایرانی نشان می‌دهد که ترجمه کتاب‌های کودکان نیازمند مهارت‌های متفاوتی است. تعداد بیشتر تعدیل‌ها در کتب کودکان نسبت به ادبیات بزرگسالان نیز نشان‌دهنده خلاقیت بیشتر برای جلب مخاطبان جوان‌تر است. این پژوهش پیامدهایی برای نهادهای مختلف در صنعت ترجمه، از جمله مترجمان، مدرسان ترجمه و سیاست‌گذاران نشر در بازار ترجمه دارد.
کلیدواژه‌ها: کتاب‌های بزرگسالان، ترجمه ارتباطی، ادبیات کودکان، ترجمه معنایی

Introduction

The title is an important and inseparable part of a book that plays a key role in attracting the reader's interest because it is the first thing that catches the attention of potential readers. The title can either attract or deter the potential readership and influence their decision whether or not to buy a book. Since we live in a world with a multitude of languages, people need to find a way to bridge this communication gap before they can share their culture and knowledge. The translation of the title is an indispensable step in translation work and plays an important role in the quality of the translation, allowing for better marketing and a wider readership. Although this area seems to be well-researched in translation studies, there are several research gaps and under-researched areas to be identified with studies such as the present one. In the last two decades, research in the field of translation has seen a remarkable upsurge, but the translation of book titles, especially from English into Persian, is still a largely unexplored area. Leo Hoek (1973), the founder of titology, the science of titles, argued that a title is a construct and a work of art created for interpretation. Titles stand for the main idea that a book wants to convey, but in Iran, not much attention has been paid to the title in translation studies. Taha (2009) explains that the author chooses a title to reflect both the text and the author's intention. According to Viezzi (2013), any direct change in the title can affect the interpretation and perception of the product.

Translating book titles is a major challenge for translators. Titles can have a positive or negative impact on potential buyers, as they are the first thing that catches their attention; and since titles reflect the content of a book and the author's intentions, it is very important to translate them carefully and to be aware that any change may result in altering the meaning that the author wants to convey. Briffa and Caruana (2009) claim that the identity of a title is derived from the context, which translators must take into account during the translation process. Most studies deal with movies and not books, and studies on the translation of book titles have not dealt with children's books, although children's books are important for society because reading books prepares young people for the future and influences their later choices. Although there are several authors in Iran who write for children, many books are translated from other languages; therefore, it is important that the translation of these books is accurate and influential. Translation has a long history in Iran, and as mentioned earlier, most studies focus on the translation of movie titles. Few studies have dealt with the translation of book titles from Persian or into Persian, and researchers have neglected

this important topic. It is also important to mention that interviews with translators are limited as they play a major role in the selection of a title and their views and opinions could help future researchers to investigate this topic more deeply and differently.

Although some research has recently been conducted on the translation of film titles in Iran (Lotfollahi & Moinzadeh, 2012; Shokri, 2014), research on the translation of book titles is rather limited, as it is wrongly assumed that print media have a limited readership. This cannot be so, considering that novels are bestsellers worldwide and that the publishing industry is a business in which the marketability of books can be enhanced by choosing the best title for each publication. Nevertheless, the translation of titles in Iran has not been thoroughly studied. There is also a lack of knowledge about the approaches and procedures used in translating titles for children's literature as opposed to adult literature. Although the translation of book titles is crucial, not much attention has been paid to the translation of book titles in the Iranian context except for a few studies (Lotfollahi & Moinzadeh, 2012; Shokri, 2014; Darwish & Sayaheen, 2019). Our knowledge of book title translation is therefore largely based on limited data.

This study aims to expand the current knowledge about book title translation and to help translators choose better book titles. The study aims to answer the following specific questions:

- 1) What procedures have Iranian translators used in accordance with Vinay and Darbelnet's Model (1995, p.31; 2004, p.128) to translate 200 book titles intended for children as opposed to adults?
- 2) In terms of Newmark's theories of Semantic and Communicative Translation (1981), how were the titles translated?
- 3) Are there any differences between the procedures and approaches used by Iranian translators for titles for adult and children's books?

Literature Review

According to Levin (1977), book titles cannot be considered a literary genre in their own right, as they are "meaningless" without the text and content of the book. There are different types of titles and their function is to connect the text to the reader. Titles usually give readers an overview of the content and thus raise readers' expectations and make them curious.

Several theories have been proposed to explain Levin's assertion that there are different types of titles. According to Levinson (1985), there are three different types of titles: referential, interpretative, and additive. Referential titles merely identify the work without giving it much meaning. Interpretive titles guide the reader through the content, while additive titles present a semantic puzzle, as they help with interpretation but do not lead the reader to the content. Newmark (1988, p. 57) suggests two types of titles: descriptive titles and allusive titles. Descriptive titles describe the subject of the text, and Newmark suggests that a “descriptive title should be retained for literary texts”. Allusive titles “have some kind of referential or figurative relationship to the subject” As for the translation of titles, Newmark (1988, p. 56) claims that translation is not necessary if the original title in the source language is short and reflects the context. However, if translation is necessary, the translated title should be related to the original title and also “sound “attractive, allusive, suggestive” so that it can entice the potential reader to buy the book.

Kelan and Xiang (2006) state that the translator should maintain the characteristics of the original title and also take into account the cultural background in order to balance the informative, esthetic, and commercial functions. People's linguistic beliefs and thoughts represent their culture. For Yin (2009), cultural characteristics play an important role in choosing a meaningful and attractive title in the target language. Taha (2009) suggests a relationship between culture and story and the title, the text, and the reader.

There are many things to consider when translating the title or text of a book, including the cultural background, to ensure an accurate and precise translation of the source text. Dynel (2010) cites proper names, humor, culturally specific elements, and wordplay as some of the complications that arise when translating movie titles, and the same is true for book titles. These elements make the task much more difficult for the translator. Another problem that translators face with book titles is that some titles may have a negative connotation in the target language or in other countries that is not present in context in the source language (Marich, 2013) describes this as a cultural problem due to the cultural differences between the source language and the target language. Sometimes these differences lead to a change in the meaning and effect that a text has on the reader.

Viezzi (2013) argues that any direct change to the title can lead to a misperception and misinterpretation of the book. He also cites literal translation as one of the most common methods

of title translation. In a way, it can be said that the most important part of any publication is the title because even if it contains only a few words or a single word, it determines the fate of a book.

Empirical Evidence for Title Translation

Gavling (2008) analyzed 156 titles of books translated from English into Swedish and 47 titles translated from Swedish into English. The analysis revealed nine different strategies for translating a book title from English into Swedish and eight strategies for translating from Swedish into English.

Dyahpramesti (2015) investigated the translation of English fictional book titles into Indonesian. Since this study analyzes the translation function of texts in bridging two different languages and cultures, from the source text to the target text, the functionalist approach is used as the main theory and framework. The data used for this research consists of thriller or romance titles that are not word-for-word translations. In addition, library and field research was conducted for this study. In the field research, 30 respondents completed a questionnaire on 30 translations. The research yielded two sets of results. The first result showed that 7 data were considered equivalent, meaning that they appeared the same by meeting the field, mode, and tenor of the texts. The other 23 data had the same mode, but the field and tenor were different, so they are not equivalent. The result of the questionnaire shows that 27 data are acceptable and 3 of them are less acceptable.

Kristina (2016) investigated Indonesian translations of Agatha Christie book titles and analyzed the equivalence of Indonesian translation for each title, investigated the translation techniques used by the translators, and finally investigated the techniques used in writing the titles into Indonesian. The research found that formal equivalence is the most common way to translate titles, while the most common technique used by translators is literal translation, and the most common technique used by translators to write titles is story essence.

Farghal and Bazzi (2017) investigated the translation of English fiction titles into Arabic. The data consisted of 100 English fiction bestsellers with their Arabic translations, which were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative analysis revealed that 60% of the data contained a literal translation, and the qualitative results showed that literal translation works very well when the title is lexically and culturally transparent.

In the Iranian context, Lotfollahi and Moeinzadeh (2012) examined 60 translations of Hollywood movie titles from English into Persian. Since movies are influential and popular all over the world, the translation of their titles is very important. This study concluded that the most commonly used translation strategies are literal translation and transliteration.

Salehi and Fumani (2013) examined the translation of 120 novel titles from English into Persian on the basis of functionalist scopio theory. The model of naming approach by Yin (2009) was used for this study. The results showed that the literal translation was used for the naming approach in 84 titles.

Shokri (2014) examined 64 movie titles that were translated from Persian into English. Since movies are a great art form that can convey the culture, viewpoint, and beliefs of one society to another society, their titles play an important role. Vinay and Darbelnet's model served as the theoretical framework for this study. The results of this study show that literal translation is the most common strategy in translating movie titles from Persian into English.

Alimardani and Vahid Dastjerdi (2021) investigated the translation of 245 book titles in the field of psychology using Genette's (1989) categorization to analyze the nature of the original titles and their translation. The second theory used in this study is Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) model to analyze the corpus, which showed that the most common translation strategy is modulation. [What are ST and TT, and what does modulation mean in this context?]

Mozaheb, Ghajarieh, and Tamizi (2022) examined the titles of 70 works by Agatha Christie translated into Persian. They used Vinay and Darbenet's model to analyze the data. Since titles are the first thing that catches the attention of potential readers, it is very important to pay attention to them. Their results showed that the most common method used by translators was literal translation, which corresponded to 50 percent of the data, and the least common method was borrowing, which corresponded to 2 percent of the data.

In the above cases, the researchers mainly studied the translation of movie titles in Iran. In this study, the translation of book titles in Iran is examined to find out whether these results also apply in Iran.

Method

This study uses a qualitative, descriptive approach to gain insights into the Persian translation of 200 titles of books for children and adults. Newmark's theories of semantic and communicative

translation are considered and they are analyzed using Vinay and Darbelnet's model. Newmark (1988) distinguishes between two types of translation: semantic and communicative translation. Semantic translation, which is similar to Nida's formal equivalence, attempts to transfer the exact contextual meaning of the SL in the TL as far as the semantic and syntactic structure of the target language allows. The communicative translation, which is close to Nida's dynamic equivalence, tries to achieve the same effect on the reader of the target language as the original text has on the reader of the source language.

The second model of analysis used in this study is that of Vinay and Darbelnet (1995, p. 31; 2004, p. 128). They first conduct a comparative stylistic analysis of English and French texts, evaluating any differences between the two texts and recognizing different translation strategies and procedures. These translation strategies include direct translation and oblique translation, which involve seven procedures, including borrowing, calque, literal translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence, and adaptation.

The researchers drew a random sample of 200 book titles, 100 of which are adult literature titles, which can be found on the Fidibo website (<https://fidibo.com/>). For books with more than one Persian translation, one of the translations was selected. The remaining 100 book titles are children's books randomly selected from Porteghaal Publication's website (<http://www.porteghaal.com/>). then the English title of each of the above books was recorded. All collected and sorted data were analyzed according to the adopted models. All data were first analyzed according to Newmark's theory to find out which translation approach was preferred by the Persian translators. A preference for communicative translation shows that the translators prefer to transfer almost the same effect that the original text has on the reader to the readers of the target text, so that the readers of the target text understand the author's intention more or less. However, if they prefer a semantic translation, they would prefer to render the exact meaning of the original text as far as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow. The next step was to apply Vinay and Darbelnet's model with its seven procedures to all the data in order to gain a deeper understanding of the translation processes used. Finally, the results and findings from both data sets were compared to identify differences in the preferred strategies for translating children's and adult titles.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of translation processes according to Newmark's theory

The first series of analyzes examined the translated titles of children's and adult books according to Newmark's distinction between communicative translation and semantic translation. Communicative translation is concerned with achieving the same effect that the original text has on the source language reader, while semantic translation remains faithful to the source language and concentrates on producing the same semantic and syntactic structure. The following tables show sample titles and the theories used for their translation.

Table 1

A selection of translated children's book titles according to Newmark

	Title	Translated Title	Semantic	Communicative
1	A Drop of Hope	یک قطره امید Back translation (A drop hope)	✓	
2	Alan's big, scary teeth	!لطفاً از من بترسید Back translation (Please from me be scared)		✓
3	Allie All Along	خواهرم هیولا شده Back translation (my sister monster is)		✓
4	All My Friends Are Dead	همه ی دوست های من Back translation (All friends my)	✓	
5	A Mango-Shaped Space	ابری به شکل انبه Back translation (Cloud in the shape of a mango)		✓

Figure 1

Translated Titles of Children's books

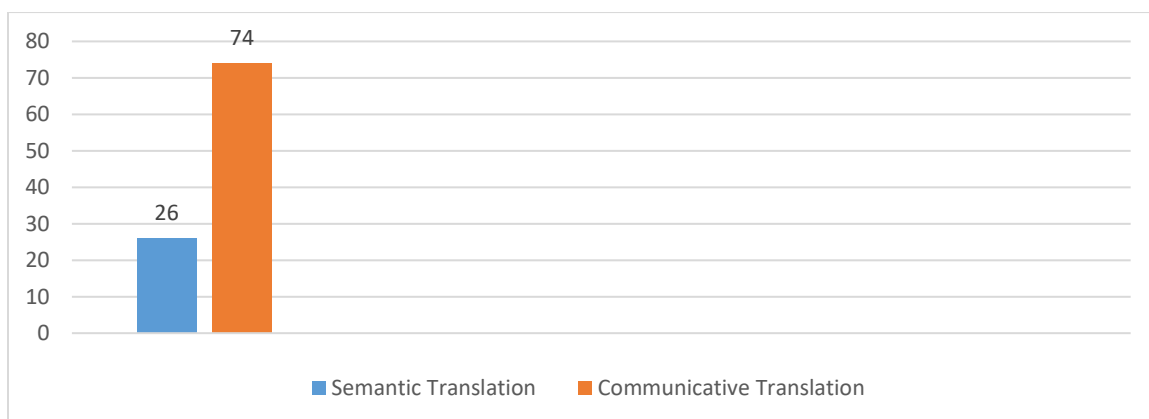


Figure 1 shows an obvious difference between the percentage of communicative translation and semantic translation in the translated children's titles. This indicates that the translators had to change the semantic and syntactic structure in order to achieve a good effect on the readers of the TL.

Table 2

A sample of Translated Titles of Adult Books according to Newmark

	Title	Translated Title	Semantic	Communicative
1	A Caribbean Mystery	معمای کارائیب	✓	
2	Acts of Infidelity	فعل بی وفایی	✓	
3	A Farewell to Arms	وداع با اسلحه	✓	
4	A Fraction of the Whole	جز از کل	✓	
5	All our yesterdays	دیروز های ما	✓	

Figure 2

Translated Titles of Adult Books according to Newmark

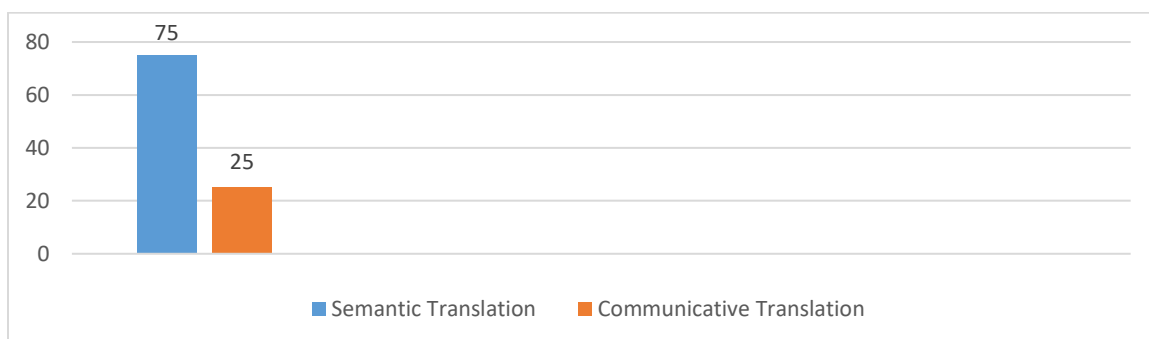


Figure 2 shows that a larger number of adult books are translated using the semantic translation and a smaller percentage using the communicative translation. The results suggest that translators prefer contrasting approaches when translating children's and adult books, mainly using semantic translation for adults and communicative translation for children.

Analysis of titles according to Vinay and Darbelnet's Model

In the second phase of the analysis, Vinay and Darbelnet's model was used, which comprises 7 strategies, from borrowing, calque, literal translation, and transposition to modulation, equivalence, and adaptation. The results of this analysis are shown in Tables 6 and 7.

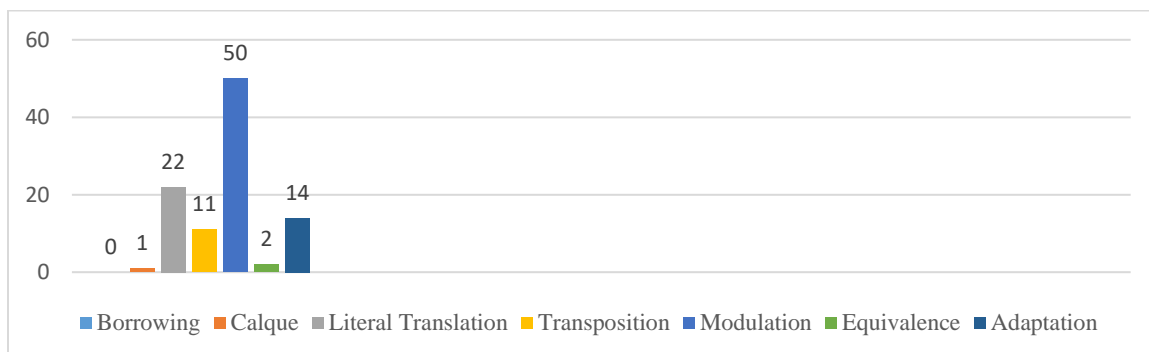
Table 3

A selection of translated children's book titles according to the Vinay and Darbenet model

	Title	Translated Title	Vinay and Darbelnet's Model
1	A Drop of Hope	یک قطره امید	Literal translation
2	Alan's big, scary teeth	لطفاً از من بترسید	Modulation
3	Allie All Along	خواهرم هیولا شده	Modulation
4	All My Friends Are Dead	... همه ی دوست های من	Literal translation
5	A Mango-Shaped Space	ابری به شکل انبه	Modulation

Figure 3

Translated Titles of Children's Books according to Vinay and Darbelnet's Model



The application of Vinay and Darbelnet's model to analyze children's titles showed that translators tend to "modulate" rather than "borrow". According to the data, 50 titles were translated with "modulation" and none with "borrowing".

Table 4

A sample of Translated Titles of Adult Books according to Vinay and Darbelnet's Model

	Title	Translated Title	Vinay and Darbenet's Model
1	A Caribbean Mystery	معمای کارائیب	Literal translation
2	Acts of Infidelity	فعل بی وفایی	Literal translation

3	A Farewell to Arms	وداع با اسلحه	Literal translation
4	A Fraction of the Whole	جز از کل	Literal translation
5	All our yesterdays	دیروز های ما	Literal translation

Figure 4

Translated Titles of Adult Books According to Vinay and Darbelnet's Model

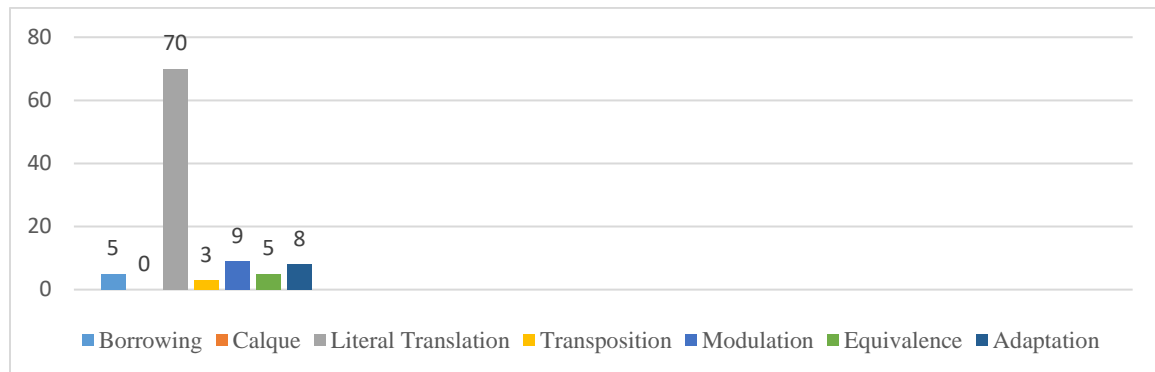


Figure 4 shows that 70 titles were translated using the 'literal translation' and none using the 'word-for-word translation', suggesting that translators prefer to translate adult titles using the 'word-for-word translation', which is the most common for languages from the same family and culture.

Differences in the employment of translation processes for Children versus adults

The analysis shows that the translators tended to translate titles for children and adults differently, using the translation techniques “modulation” and “communicative” for children's books and “literal translation” and “semantic” for adult books. These results show that the translators are aware of the target group and try to tailor their translations to the readers. In modulation, translators change the semantics and point of view of the source language. In communicative translation, translators try to achieve almost the same effect, but in a different way. These two approaches are mainly used when translating titles for children. In other words, translators tend to convert the language into a different, more child-friendly language that is more understandable for children. The translators have chosen to render the same effect, not the same language. Perhaps this is because children are not yet able to understand and comprehend difficult words and complicated structures.

In literal translation, the translators translate word for word and do not change the text. In semantic translation, the translators strive to reproduce the syntactic and semantic structure of the second language as accurately as possible. In other words, the translators are faithful to the source language. When translating books for adults, translators have mainly opted for these two variants. The reason for this approach may be that adults can deal with a more complicated language structure than children. Also, adults are familiar with a larger vocabulary, so it is not really necessary to change the language and vocabulary during the translation process.

This research has shown that the translation of titles for children and adults differs in many ways. When translating titles for children, modulation was the most commonly used method, which shows that translators need to change the semantics and point of view of the source language to make it more understandable for children. This applies to both children and adults: they should be able to identify with the book, its title, and its content. If they are not able to do this, they may not enjoy reading the book. It is therefore necessary to translate titles and books according to the needs of the target market.

The use of different translation processes and approaches by Iranian translators shows that the translation of children's literature titles requires different skills from the translators. The higher number of adaptations in children's books compared to adult books also shows that more creativity is required to maintain the interest of younger readers.

In terms of empirical evidence on the translation of titles, researchers have mainly looked at books for adults. Accordingly, there was little data on the translation of children's book titles. In general, the results of previous studies showed that literal translation is the most common method used by translators when translating titles (e.g., Mozaheb, et al., 2022). The results of this study confirm that literal translation is the most common method used by translators to translate adult book titles.

The results of the current study are in line with some of the studies mentioned in the literature review, including Kristia (2016) and Farghal and Bazzi (2017). The first study showed that the most common translation technique used by translators for Agatha Christie's titles into Indonesian was literal translation. The second study examined the translation of English novel titles into Arabic and found that 60% of the data was translated through literal translation. In the Iranian context, the findings of this study are in line with those of Lotfollahi and Moeinzadeh (2012),

Salehi and Fumani (2013), Shokri (2014) and Mozaheb, Ghajarieh and Tamizi (2022). All of these studies examined movie or book titles for adult audiences and found literal translation to be the most common strategy. The main contribution of this study is that the titles of children's books were examined using models and approaches commonly used to analyze translated adult fiction. While this study has shown that such models can be extended to the translation of children's literature as a growing subfield of translation studies, translation studies researchers need to develop more specific models for literary works aimed at children. In particular, a theoretical basis for the translation of emotions should be included in the analysis of book titles for children, as the emotional load of title words, in this case, is higher for children, suggesting that literal translation may not work well for children's literature.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyze the translation processes in the two genres of children's and adult literature, focusing on the rendering of book titles. The results show that translators tend to change the semantics of the language in children's books, whereas in adult books they prefer not to change the semantics and use a word-for-word translation. A practical consequence of these findings is that the translation of book titles must be done differently when the target readers are not adults. A competent translator needs to consider several aspects when translating for different age groups, including a wise choice of title. This research has implications for translators, translation teachers, and others involved in the translation of books and films. In addition, the results of this study can raise awareness of the importance of translatable titles for literary works before publication.

Future studies could examine the impact of different book genres on translation. They should also examine the translation of titles for different age groups, including teenagers. Further qualitative research studies in this area would be very helpful, as they can shed more light on what criteria translators and publishers use before deciding on market-driven titles. This research could encourage policymakers in the publishing industry to set some criteria in their house rules for the translation of book titles for children and adults. The results of this comparative study can provide insight into the different translation methods for English and Persian-language book titles for adults and children. It could show how translators approach translating for different age groups and whether they take readers' preferences and expectations into account. The study could also

highlight the importance of translating book titles with cultural sensitivity and awareness of the target audience. Ultimately, this research can help to raise the standard of translated literary works and promote intercultural understanding.

It is not easy to translate a text from a foreign source language into the target language while trying to keep the same effect and meaning as close as possible to the target language; and yet this is what translators try their best to do. It is hoped that this groundbreaking study on the translation of children's literature will shed more light on how to translate what is lost in the translation of titles for different readers.

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