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Delving into the Translator's Achievement in the Translation of Humor from English into Persian: The Case of *Teule's the Suicide Shop*

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Abstract

The present study made an attempt to determine the translator's choices made, both at macro and micro levels, to render humor from English into Persian. To this end, the English version of Teule's (2008) *The Suicide Shop* and its Persian translation, which was made by Karamveisi (2017), was carefully investigated to extract humor and Persian translations. Then, Chiaro's (2010) taxonomy of translation strategies, including *replace the source VEH with a different instance of VEH in the TL*, *replace the source VEH with an idiomatic expression in the TL*, *ignore the VEH altogether*, and *leave the VEH unchanged*, were applied to examine the translation strategies employed by Karamveisi to cope with humor. Karamveisi's overall strategy for the whole text was also probed on the basis of Nida's (1964) formal and dynamic equivalences. As the results indicated, Karamveisi was interested in the employment of the TT-oriented translation strategies rather than the ST-oriented ones that led his overall strategy at macro level to be the TT-oriented and his translation to be dynamic. Hence, Karamveisi was able to create the humorous effect on the recipients and amuse them successfully.

Keywords: dynamic equivalence, formal equivalence, humor, humor translation

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1. Introduction

Humor refers to a funny word or phrase produced to make people laugh. According to Cambridge advance learner's dictionary (2013), humor is the ability to find things funny. Lefcourt, Davidson-Katz, and Kueneman (1990) believe that the laughter caused by humor can act as a stimulus to make people relax because of the relationship between stress and secretory immunoglobulin A (S-IgA). To approve this, Latta (1998) argues that the laughter of humor aims to "relax in a situation in which a person finds that he or she has nothing to cope with" (p. 97). However, providing a descriptive definition for humor is not an easy task because it is "a touchy subject" (Raphaelson-West, 1989, p. 129). That is to say, some, as Carrell (2008) discusses, find humor as the comic, the funny, or the ludicrous; whereas others know it as synonymous with wit or comedy.

Like culture-specific items that are specific to a particular culture and language, humor comes from the inside of the culture that represents the way of life, beliefs, and speaking of a society. Humor also establishes communication between two cultures because it, as Phimtan and Tapinta (2011, p. 80) state, is "a part of human culture," considering a sensitive factor in communication. This makes the task of the translator more difficult than ever due to needing to "act upon textual items that often contravene the norm, or to use words or sentences that have never been used before" (Zabalbeascoa, 2005, p. 2). Besides, humor translation, as he implies, becomes challenging for the translator due to the readers' limited linguistic knowledge of, or, their lack of familiarity with certain subject-matters, themes, genres, and types of humor. In Heydon's and Kianbakht view (2020), this challenge becomes bigger when the translator's working language originates from a distant and different culture.

Most of the time, some reference to the source culture is made, and there is no obvious equivalent in the Target Language (TL). This can be taken into account as one of the most challenging tasks with that a translator is confronted. The most important point in humor translation is the translatability of humor if the humorous sense of the source text (ST) is kept in the target text (TT). This can be accomplished by employing suitable translation strategies/methods to achieve an appropriate equivalent for the ST item and produce the humorous effect on the recipients. For Nida (1964), the focus should be on the process of the translation rather than on the text itself by employing one of his translation methods, formal equivalence or dynamic equivalence, which the former is not his ideal method due to loss of meaning. Thus, he suggests that the translation the translator produces should be "the closest natural equivalent of the source language message" (p. 166). This is what the readers of translated humor are looking for because dynamic/functional equivalence keeps them amused "even if it entails an extreme departure from the ST" (Chiaro, 2010, p. 7).

Besides, the choice the translator makes to cope with humor is considered as the most prominent issue that translators mainly fail in doing so. The above challenges with that the translator encounters, can be mostly removed via a perfect choice. This alludes to the problem-solving process that is defined by PACTE (2000, p. 102) as "a series of acts or recursive, complex acts that lead from an initial state to an objective," which is heavily dependent on the translator's choice(s) made wisely at both macro and micro levels. At macro level, the choice is often made on the basis of the policy of the translation that is defined in advance. This leads to the translator's choices at micro level. For example, if the policy of the translation is domestication, s/he should apply the TT-oriented strategies, such as cultural equivalence and substitution strategies, and make the right choices between equivalences at micro level to achieve the objective of the translation at macro level. That is to say, the choice is of the utmost importance because it not only defines the translation policy but also affects the three characteristics of the translation, including accuracy, fluency, and understandability.

The present study attempted to find out the choice the translator made, both at macro and micro levels, to cope with humor from English into Persian. In other words, this study investigated the translation strategies the translator employed to translate humor (at word and phrase levels) and the overall strategy he applied to the whole text. To achieve the objectives of the present study, the following questions were raised:

1. Which translation strategies, presented by Chiaro (2010), did the translator employ to cope with humor?
2. Was the relationship between the type of translation strategies and the number of them used by Karamveisi significant?
3. What choice did the translator make between Nida's (1964) formal and dynamic equivalences as his overall strategy?

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4. Based on the answers received from the above questions, was the translator successful in the translation of humor from English into Persian?

This study is significant because it devotes its attention to one of the challenging areas in the profession that translators face. It also addresses the existing gap in the research by examining the translator's solutions to the translation of humor from English into Persian. Furthermore, most recent studies in Iran have been focused on dubbing and subtitling rather than written translations (see Section 2.3). This makes the present study more prominent and worthy of attention. The findings of the present study inform translators of how to deal with humor and make aware them of how challenging such items are for them and of what an acceptable translation should be. Hence, the current study can be helpful for teachers and translation students majoring in translation.

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1. Humor

There is no a unique definition of humor, or, even a clear answer to what humor is due to a disagreement between theorists/researchers with such an important issue. In this way, each theorist/researcher defines humor from his/her own view. A lack of enthusiasm to define humor over the extreme variety, as Ermida (2008) describes, is one of the drawbacks of this phenomena. She further states that there are two types of humor, verbal humor and non-verbal humor; which can come from mental experience and help achieve communicative purposes. According to Ermida, humor can take advantage of common everyday reality or include fiction and imagination; as well as be produced automatically or be applied as a fully prepared technique of personal and professional interaction. Thus, it, as Ermida mentions, is expected to have a wide variety of approaches to analyses and interpretations of humor.

Robson (2008) expresses that each humor type has its *disjunctor*, such as a word or phrase leading the audience to search for the connector's secondary meaning and inform of what that humor will be. He states that it is usually difficult to be careful about such matters although, in some cases, the translation of humor makes the listener/reader aware of the exact nature of it. Robinson believes that the chance given to the translator is that the two related and different meanings of a single polyvalent source language (SL) word are also two different meanings of a single polyvalent TL word. In such cases, the two language systems, as he argues, are compatible, which makes humor translatable. By contrast, when the two language systems are inconsistent, a substitution strategy, as Robson suggests, can be a good choice to render humor that an inventive translator can employ.

In her book *Translation, Humor, and Literature*, Chiaro (2010) describes that humor is a linguistic and cultural element produced in the source culture that loses its power in a new location. She further states that humor can be words or phrases including more than one meaning and distinctive references to people, history, events, and customs of a specific culture that pose serious challenges for translators who are expert at comic literature, theatre and films, as well as for anyone who tries to tell a joke or makes people laugh in a language other than their own. The problem, as Chiaro (2008) implies, arises when verbal humor or verbally expressed humor (VEH) is translated interlingually, from one language to another due to challenges relating to the most debatable issues in Translation Studies (TS), namely equivalence and translatability.

Chiaro (2017) emphasizes the equivalent effect and considers it relevant to the translation of VEH, such as jokes, gags, witticisms etc., because humor, like poetry, pushes language to such an extent that it is difficult to find interlingual solutions. This somehow rejects formal equivalence method and approves dynamic equivalence strategy that, as Chiaro implies, points to the TT-oriented approach in which the function is of great importance. Translatability, as Chiaro defines, is "the capacity of transferring meaning from one language to the other, without it undergoing radical changes" (p. 417). Paradoxically, radical changes, as she mentions, are indeed inevitable due to the difference of any language leading to the physically diversion of the translation from the original, which is not a main concern in similar languages. It is rather to say, humor is in need of such a situation because it "is bound to be where most radical changes occur" (Chiaro, p. 417).

Chiaro (2010) proposes four translation strategies to be employed by translators to cope with VEH, which are as follows:

1. leave the VEH unchanged: humor is completely lost to conform to formal equivalence.

"he's the artist of the family, our Van Gogh!" (p. 9)

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"او بی شک هنرمند خانواده ماست، ونگگ ماست." (ص. ۶)

“The customer opens her eyes and looks at the mirror. ‘Noémie Ben Sala-Darjeeling.’" (p. 82)

"مشتری چشمانش را باز کرد و به آیینه نگریست. نائومی بن سالا دارجیلینگ." (ص. ۴۹)

2. replace the source VEH with a different instance of VEH in the TL: humor is retained in the TL by substituting the SL word with the TL word.

“I always get the skivvy’s jobs” (p. 15)

"همیشه هرچی خرحمالیه مال منه" (ص. ۸)

“She advances blindly, gripping two detonators in her fists” (p. 108)

"او کورمال کورمال جلومی آمد و دستش به ضامن کلاهخود بود." (ص. ۸۲)

3. replace the source VEH with an idiomatic expression in the TL: humor is cut and replaced with an idiomatic expression in the TL.

“I have more than enough to do without forever seeing you as happy as a lark.”(p. 42)

"اونقدر کار روسرم ریخته که نمی خوام دائم اینجوری مثل بلبل برام به به و چه چه شادونه کنی." (ص. ۲۳)

“A cow wouldn’t be able to find her calf here!” (p. 101)

"اینجا سگ صاحب خودش رو نمیشناسه!" (ص. ۷۳)

4. ignore the VEH altogether: humor is omitted without any substitution.

“A trapdoor in the floor opens like a mouth and, tongue-like, a bald pate pops out.” (p. ۵)

"دریچه کف مغازه دهان باز کرد و کله تاسی بیرون پرید." (ص. ۴)

“... in tired old slippers and wearing the kimono with the red cross (for self-disembowelment) instead of pyjamas...” (p. 93)

"...دمپایی های کهنه ای پایش بود و بجای پیژامه، کیمونو به تن داشت..." (ص. ۶۱)

2.2. Nida’s Formal and Dynamic Equivalences

As it is said before, the concept of equivalence is one of the main controversial issues in TS that poses serious challenges for translators. Although scholars, as Chiaro (2010) states, reach the general agreement on the impossibility of achieving an absolute equivalence between ST and TT, the translator must “seek to find the closest possible equivalent” (Nida, 1964, p. 159). According to Nida, there are fundamentally two types of equivalence, formal and dynamic equivalences. The former, as he defines, follows the SL structure and aims to transfer the massage itself, in both form and content. In such a translation, the translator should be faithful to the ST and accept formal orientation to correspond the message in the receptor language as closely as possible to the different elements in the SL

In contrast to formal equivalence, dynamic one focuses on complete naturalness of translation and attempts to “relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture” (p. 160). The translator does not require to have a complete understanding of the cultural patterns of the TL context to comprehend the message, but the significant point that most literary artists, researchers, and professional translators are in full agreement with and the translator should bear in mind is dynamic orientation to produce equivalent effect. In the case of VEH, formal equivalence “is frequently sacrificed for the sake of dynamic equivalence” (Chiaro, 2010, p. 8), due to the loss of some aspects of the ST in order for the TL improvement as Chiaro (2008) mentions. In a sense, if humor, as Chiaro discusses, serves the same function in the TT to amuse the TT readers, it does not matter that the TT depart somehow formally from the ST.

2.3. Recent Studies in the Field

Notwithstanding the challenging and importance of the subject under investigation, few empirical studies have been done in this area of translation in Iran. For example, Abadi and Afzali (2020) investigated Panek’s (2009) taxonomy of translation strategies employed in dubbing of Zootopia to translate VEH from English into both Arabic and Persian.

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As the results showed, literal translation and paraphrasing translation strategies were the mostly used strategies in Arabic dubbing and in Persian dubbing respectively. Moreover, the different use of modulation strategy in both dubbed versions indicated the preference of Persian translators to harmonize the structure of animation's humor with the target culture and language. Accordingly, Arab translators were more successful than Persian translators in localizing humor.

In the same study, Hashemian and Farhang-Ju (2021) examined the appropriateness of the Persian humor expressions and their translations in English based on Buijzen and Valkenberg's (2004) humor typology and on Davies' (2003) and Buijzen, as well as on Valkenberg's (2004) taxonomies of translation strategies. The results indicated that the mostly employed humor typologies were clumsiness and parody. In addition, omission, word –for-word translation, and free translation strategies were employed frequently. Thus, translations of humor produced by the translator(s) resulted in failure that cause them not to produce humorous translations.

Sadeghpour (2021) also paid attention to subtitling and dubbing and determined the adequacy of humor transference from English into Persian. He applied Larsen's (1993) classification of humorous expressions to classify humor and Pedersen's (2011) taxonomy of translation strategies to analyze the selected data. The results of the study illustrated the translators' TT orientation in dubbing and their ST orientation in subtitling that both translation methods failed to transfer the humorous effect of the STs on the TTs. Moreover, the transference of humor was accomplished more adequately in the dubbed versions than the subtitled versions. The mostly effective translation strategies for dubbed version were situational substitution and cultural substitution strategies, and for subtitled versions were situational substitution and generalization.

3. Methodology

3.1 Corpus

The corpus of the study encompassed the English version of Teule's (2008) *The Suicide Shop* and its Persian translation. The book was originally written in French and published by Éditions Julliard publishing company in 2006, which was translated into English by Sue Dyson (2008) and published by Gallic Books in 157 pages. The Persian translation of *The Suicide Shop* was made by Karamveisi (2017) and published by Nashr-e-cheshmeh in 114 pages. The genre of the book is *black comedy* that was first considered by André Breton, a surrealism French writer and poet, as a sub-genre of comedy. *The Suicide Shop* is one of the popular and bestsellers humorous books that includes many types of humor because Teule deals with death and suicide with a sense of humor. That is why this book was deemed to be appropriate as the corpus of the present study.

3.2 Design

The current study is descriptive in nature that employed qualitative method. It deals with humor translation and the way humor items, which were extracted from the book *The Suicide Shop,* were translated from English into Persian. Descriptive method enables the researcher to describe the features of population and to devote his/her attention on *what* of the subject under study rather than on *why* of the subject under study. This method, as Gay (1992) argues, includes gathering data to justify hypotheses or to search for the answers of questions raised about the current status of the subject matter.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

For data collection, the English version of the book *The Suicide Shop* was put under a full investigation. In other words, both versions of the book were carefully read to extract humor and Persian translations. Then, Chiaro's (2010) taxonomy of translation strategies was applied to determine the translation strategies employed by Karamveisi to cope with humor through comparing humor and their Persian translation. This led to probe his overall strategy employed for the whole text based on Nida's Formal and dynamic equivalences strategies. Finding out Karamveisi's strategy at macro level helped the researcher examine his achievement in producing the humorous effect on the target readers. Moreover, frequencies and percentages of translation strategies employed by Karamveisi were illustrated in tabulation forms. The chi-square (X^2) test was also used to see whether the relation between the type of translation strategies and the number of them used by Persian translator was significant.

4. Results

As Table 1 indicates, the total number of translation strategies used by Karamveisi was ($N = 81$) of which *replace the source VEH with a different instance of VEH in the TL* ($n = 37$) and *leave the VEH unchanged* ($n = 7$) were the

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most/least used translation strategies respectively. In addition, Table 2 shows the sum of the ST-oriented strategies (*N* = 7) used by Karamveisi that was lower than the sum of the TT-oriented strategies (*N* = 74) employed by him.

Table 1. Frequencies and percentages of translation strategies used by Karamveisi for translating VEH

Translation Strategies	*f*	*%*
Replace the source VEH with a different instance of VEH in the TL	37	46.0
Replace the source VEH with an idiomatic expression in the TL	23	28.0
Ignore the VEH altogether	14	17.0
Leave the VEH unchanged	7	9.0
Total	81	100.0

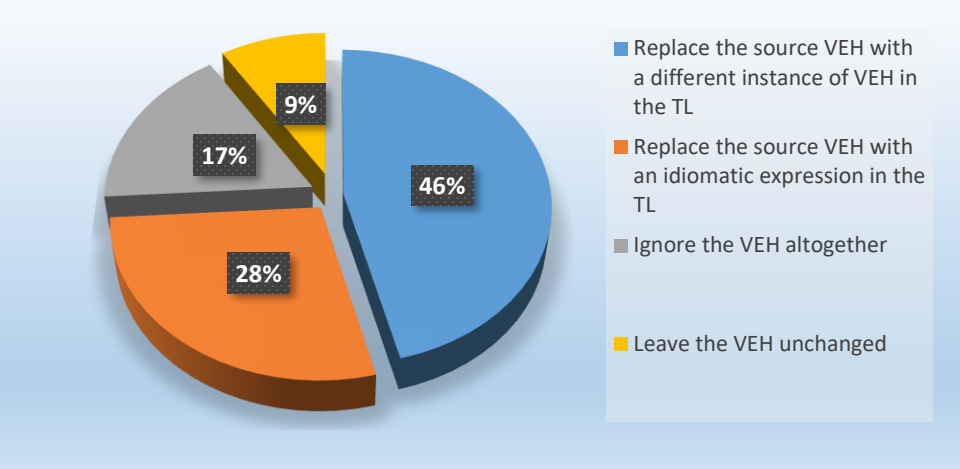


Figure 1. Percentages of translation strategies used by Karamveisi for translating VEH

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Table 2. Frequency and percentage of the ST and TT-oriented strategies used by Karamveisi for translating VEH

ST-Oriented Strategies	*f*	%	TT-Oriented Strategies	*f*	%
Leave the VEH unchanged	7	100.0	Replace the source VEH with a different instance of VEH in the TL	37	50.0
			Replace the source VEH with an idiomatic expression in the TL	23	31.0
			Ignore the VEH altogether	14	19.0
Sum	7	100.0	Sum	74	100.0

Table 3. Frequency and percentage of Karamveisi's choice between Nida's formal and dynamic equivalences for humor translation

Formal Equivalence	*f*	%	Dynamic Equivalence	*f*	%
Sum	7	9.0	Sum	74	91.0

According to Table 3, Karamveisi's choice between Nida's (1964) formal and dynamic equivalences for humor translation was the latter translation strategy. In other words, he employed dynamic equivalence ($N = 71$) rather than formal equivalence ($N = 7$) for the translation of the whole text.

4.1 Chi-Square Test (X^2)

The chi-square (X^2) test is an appropriate test used to justify the hypothesis. It "measures how a model compares to actual observed data" (Hayes, 2021). It is rather to say, the X^2, as Abdi (2021) argues, enables the researcher "to estimate the probability that the observed relationship obtained from the chance" (p. 12). Hence, the researcher run the X^2 to see whether there is a significant relationship between the type of translation strategies and the number of them used by Karamveisi. Table 3 reveals that the relationship between the type and the number of translation strategies applied by Karamveisi was not significant at $p < .05$ due to the higher amount of p value than .05 level of significance ($p = .641$, $p > .05$). Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted and retained at the .05 level of significance.

Table 4. Summary of the Chi-Square test for the translation strategies and the total number of them used by Karamveisi

Types of Translation Strategies	*N*	X^2	*df*	*p*
n				
4	81	1.68	3	.641

5. Discussion

Based on the results, Karamveisi employed all Chiaro's (2010) translation strategies to deal with VEH. This includes *replace the source VEH with a different instance of VEH in the TL*, *replace the source VEH with an idiomatic expression in the TL*, *ignore the VEH altogether*, and *leave the VEH unchanged.* The Persian translator gave also great preference to the TT-oriented strategies rather than to the ST-oriented ones. This gives an indication of his overall strategy at macro level and his orientation towards the TT structure. For example, the VEH phrases *a funereal voice,*

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and *a length of hemp* were appropriately translated into طناب دار ، با لحن یه بابا مرده ، via *replace the source VEH with a different instance of VEH in the TL* strategy. Karamveisi used frequently such a TT-oriented strategy to cope with humor because it helped him skillfully produce the humorous effect on the recipients to a great degree.

As the results illustrate, the next mostly used translation strategy was *replace the source VEH with an idiomatic expression in the TL*. For instance, the statements *she's a pain in the neck*, and *you suffocate to death* were individually translated into عجب کنه ای بود ، and خواب به خواب میشی. This strategy enabled Karamveisi to find an acceptable equivalent for the SL structure easily leading to a significant change in the meaning. Moreover, he gave a local color to the SL statements by using such a TT-oriented strategy and was successful in making humorous translations. Chiaro (2010) considers this TT-oriented strategy as an extra choice for the translator through which s/he can remove the VEH and substitute an idiomatic expression for it. For Bucaria (2017), the previous strategy is an ideal one to render humor and reach the desired outcome. The reason may be that idioms are not funny in their own nature, "but possibly jazz up the TT in a similar way to wordplay" (Chiaro, 2017, p. 424). Hence,

According to the results, Karamveisi applied *ignore the VEH altogether* strategy less than other TT-oriented ones. The use of this strategy means to omit the VEH that, as Chiaro (2010) explains, refers to either "a deliberate translational strategy or the lack of recognition of the original wordplay" (p. 12). That is why the infrequent use of this TT-oriented strategy can show Karamveisi's considerable strength in the humor translation. Another translational strength of Karamveisi lies in the use of *leave the VEH unchanged* that was the least used strategy from Chiaro's translation strategies. Although it is necessary to be faithful to the ST structure via the ST-oriented strategies, in some cases, the translator should have an appropriate use of these strategies to transfer the humorous sense to the recipients.

Like most cultural references that their meanings were correctly conveyed to the recipients through *leave the VEH unchanged* strategy and the use of endnote for each item, some were unclear to the recipients to some extent. For example, the ST cultural references *the Apple Macintosh logo* and *our Van Gogh* were rendered into لوگوی مکینتاش اپل and ونگگ ماست respectively. These references may be familiar to some target readers, but not to all. Indeed, it is difficult to find acceptable equivalents for such humor items that do not lead to misinterpretation of them. Thus, Karamveisi may believe that this method of translation would give him a chance to preserve the humorous effect and prevent them from misinterpreting. However, it would be better if Karamveisi provided these references with either footnote or an additional explanation to enhance the recipients' understanding and create the humorous effect well.

According to the results, the overall strategy of Karamveisi was Nida's (1964) dynamic equivalence, indicating his choice for humor translation. In other words, his choice at macro level to deal with a humor book, which contains many humorous items, led to his choices at micro level that were perfectly made in such a way that these choices enable him to successfully transfer the humorous meaning of such items to the TT and produce a dynamic translation of the book. This requires both transference competence and strategic competence, which Karamveisi possesses. The former competence refers to "the ability to complete the transfer process from the ST to the TT," which is considered the key competence because it "integrates all the others" (PACTE, 2000, p. 102). The latter competence, as Tennent, Davies, and Torras (2000) argue, is the steps taken via the use of potential procedures to "solve a translation problem which has been consciously detected and resulting in a consciously applied solution" (p. 108).

The results obtained from this study bear some similarities to Abdi's (2019) study in that the male translators were more successful than the female translators in producing comprehensive translations to the target readers. This is because of the more use of the TT-oriented strategies than the ST-oriented ones, which led their overall strategy at macro level to be the TT-oriented. As opposed to the results of the current study, some parts of the results of Hossieni and Mobaraki's (2017) study indicated the less achievement of Pirnazar than Daryabandari in translating humor from English into Persian. This was due to the more use of the ST-oriented strategies than TT-oriented ones by Pirnazar. Along with differences and similarities between the results of the study and the previously mentioned studies, the results of the current research were mainly in line with related studies in the literature. In this regard, Abadi and Afzali (2020) concluded that the Arab translators had better performance than the Persian translators in localizing humor, pointing to the more use of the TT-oriented strategies. According to Sadeghpour (2021), the infrequent use of the TT-oriented strategies belittled the translators' achievement in the translation of humor in the dubbed version; whereas the frequent use of the same strategies resulted in their success in the transference of humor in the subtitled version.

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6. Conclusion

Humor is one of the features of any language that is derived from the culture of a society and represent it. Humor puts into "the literary genre and is very creative;" hence, the creativity of the translator should be used as much as possible when dealing with this text type (Harrison, 2012, p. 40). The present study aimed to explore the translator's solutions, both at macro and micro levels, to the translation of humor from English into Persian. In a sense, this study examined the translation strategies applied by Karamveisi to cope with humor and the overall strategy used by him for the whole text. Furthermore, the translator's achievement in the translation of humor was investigated. As the results indicate, Karamveisi employed the TT-oriented strategies in preference to the ST-oriented ones, which points to his TT orientation at macro level and the employment of Nida's (1964) dynamic equivalence for translating humor. Thus, the results of the study reveal Karamveisi's excellent choices that were made during the translation process to solve the problems relating to humor translation leading to his success in producing dynamic and humorous translations.

In approval, Bucaria (2017) argues that the main advantage of dynamic equivalence is that it proposes excellent solutions to the TL in order to enhance the understanding of the SL to the recipients instead of just transferring the literal meanings. As a result, choosing an appropriate equivalent for humor, as she discusses, does not just reflect the formal structure of the SL humor, but, by contrast, successfully declares its intention to keep the recipient happy in the context of what they are reading. In addition, the results of the current study highlighted the importance of the choice(s) made by the translator both at macro and micro levels in humor translation. The translator needs to acquire and improve some competences, such as strategic and transference competences, to make the wise choice between translation strategies/methods or among different meanings and equivalents available for the humorous item when translating humor. Furthermore, the results indicated that the TT-oriented strategy is mainly considered the most suitable strategy to cope with humor because of a wide range of humorous expressions and items included in Persian language that helps the translator to convey the meaning and create the effect of the SL item humorously.

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