

Merits and Demerits of Domestication Procedure in Children’s Animations: A case study of two dubbed cartoons “*The Incredibles*” and “*Barnyard*”

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Abstract

Among the fans of animated films young children are the most popular. This has led the dubbing industry to produce domesticated animations for the young audience of a different language and culture. In other words, in most cases dubbers attempt to adopt domestication procedures to make the language of animations easier and more tangible for children. The domestication strategies may bring both children and their parents great satisfaction. However, as a result of domestication, the dubbers may go too far and utilize a language which is not appropriate for children. Based on Venuti’s theory (1995) of domestication, the present study took a look at the merits and demerits of this procedure. It actually aimed at exploring different cases of inappropriate domestication in the two dubbed cartoons “*The Incredibles*” and “*Barnyard*”.

Key words: Domestication, dubbing, animation, dubbed cartoons, merits, demerits

Introduction

O’Connel (2000) states: “communication between different languages and cultures around the world has been extremely enhanced by the help of mass media. The frequent information exchange and human interactions has brought audiovisual translation to the translation activities, and like any other medium, requires proper translation to make the products (e.g. cartoons) as widely accessible as possible”.

Furthermore, since animated films are entertaining and attractive to the viewers, they have millions of fans all over the world and in many countries today, a large number of animations are either produced or dubbed (from other languages). In Iran too, dubbing is a popular form of audio-visual translation because compared to subtitling, it is more understandable and undemanding to children of different age groups. A brief glance at the Persian dubbed animations indicates that there are professional dubbers in Iran who have considerably attracted the young audience’s attention by their enthralling dubbing. The way of dubbing is so professional in certain cases that even adults are encouraged to watch these foreign animations. Yet, since the addresses of animations are mainly the young audience, it is worth examining this issue more carefully.

Despite the popularity of dubbing industry and the achievements of professional dubbers, the researcher thinks that dubbing suffers from some inappropriate procedures one of which is domestication. However, the aim of this study is not to question domestication which has long been regarded as an acceptable strategy among translation scholars and experts. This paper attempts to show, although domestication has great advantages, it may sometimes cause unexpected problems.

Several studies have been conducted on dubbing strategies recently, but few have discussed the benefits and drawbacks of domestication in dubbing. First, this paper discusses the background of domestication in translation studies to show how different scholars have favored a

domesticated approach to translation from the past until today. Next, it will argue the good features of this common strategy and finally, it goes over the problems caused by domestication by examining two animations closely. The researcher will try to find cases of unsuitable translation (dubbing) as a result of domestication to show that this acceptable strategy may sometimes exert a negative influence on children.

Background of the study

A quick glance through the history of translation studies shows that many experts in the field have favored a fluent and domesticated rendering over a foreign visible translation. Although the terms “domestication” and “foreignization” have been introduced by Venuti into the field only recently, the description of some scholars’ approaches by themselves indicates that an acceptable translation is one in which the words are conformed to the reader’s language. For instance, Cicero (46 BCE/ 1960 CE), describes his strategy in the translation of *De Optimo genere oratorum* in the following terms:

And I did not translate them as an interpreter, but as an orator, keeping the same ideas and forms, or as one might say, the ‘figures’ of thought, but in language which conforms to our usage. And in so doing, I did not hold it necessary to render word for word, but I preserved the general style and force of the language. (As cited in Munday, 2001, p.19)

The debate over the ‘word-for-word’ (i.e. ‘literal’) and ‘sense-for-sense’ (i.e. free) translation until the second half of the twentieth century might be related to the idea of domestication and foreignization. Most scholars at that time gave the advantage to a fluent readable translation which as Baker (1997) puts it “conveyed the meaning of the original without distorting the target language”.

In the seventeenth century, some famous figures like Dryden preferred ‘translation with latitude’ and criticized the literal translator as being ‘verbal copier’ (Dryden, 1680/1992, p.18). Another great scholar who exerted a strong influence in the field in the eighteenth century is Tytler who describes a ‘good translation’ as follows:

That in which the merit of the original work is so completely transfused into another language as to be as distinctly apprehended, and as strongly felt, by a native of the country to which that language belongs as it is by those who speak the language of the original work. (Tytler, 1797, p.14)

As we can see, Tytler’s strategy is TL-reader oriented which is in some way very close to the idea of domestication described by Venuti.

However, the most important figure in the field is Friedrich Schleiermacher whose lecture on different methods of translation in 1813 exerted a strong influence on translation theories. Schleiermacher considers there to be only two methods of translation:

Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him (as cited in Venuti, 1995, pp. 19-20)

Venuti(1995) states that “Schleiermacher allowed the translator to choose between a domesticating method, an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target language cultural values bringing the author back home, and a foreignizing method, an ethno-deviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad”(Venuti, 1995, p.20).

In addition, Nida(1964) in the discussion of dynamic equivalence, remarks that:

A translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his/her own culture (Nida, 1964, p.159).

One more time, Venuti (1995) believes that the phrase “naturalness of expression” shows the importance of a fluent strategy and in Nida’s work it is apparent that fluency involves domestication.

Nida (1964) describes ‘the principle of equivalent effect’ in a way that “the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message”. He also argues that “This receptor-oriented approach considers adaptations of grammar, of lexicon and of cultural references to be essential in order to achieve naturalness; the TT language should not show interference from the SL, and the ‘foreignness’ of the ST setting is minimized (Nida, 1964a, pp. 167-8).

Also, Hatim and Mason (1997) refer to domestication as follows: “The dominant trend towards domestication in translating from American English over the last three centuries has had a normalizing and neutralizing effect, depriving source text producers of their voice and re-expressing foreign cultural values in terms of what is familiar (and therefore unchallenging) to the dominant culture” (Hatim & Mason, 1997, p.145)

Szarkowska (2005) believes that the result of domestication is the assimilation of all foreign elements into the dominant target culture and this will actually lead to the deprivation of the target audience of the essential characteristics of the source culture. She also mentions that domestication is a strategy that privileges the target culture over the source culture. According to her, “translation is often seen as a form of conquest and can even become an expression of nationalism”.

Venuti himself describes an acceptable translation in the eyes of publishers, reviewers, and readers as follows:

A translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or non-fiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer’s personality or intention or essential meaning of the foreign text- the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the ‘original’ (Venuti, 1995, p.1)

Although Venuti does not believe in the transparency and fluency of translation himself, he describes a fluent translation in English according to authorities as a translation “that is current (“modern”) instead of archaic, that is widely used instead of specialized (“jargonization”) (Venuti, 1995, p.4).

According to him, “a fluent translation is immediately recognizable and intelligible, “familiarized”, “domesticated”, not “disconcertingly” foreign, capable of giving the reader unobstructed “access to great thoughts” to what is “present in the original.” (ibid, pp. 4-5)

With regard to the discussion of domestication above, there are two research questions that are to be investigated in the present study:

1. To what extent have the dubbers utilized domestication in dubbing the animations “*The Incredibles*” and “*Barnyard*?”
2. What are the advantages of domestication procedure adopted in Persian dubbed animations “*The Incredibles*” and “*Barnyard*?”
3. Do the domesticated elements in the above mentioned cartoons have a negative influence on children?

Method

This study adopts a comparative descriptive method to examine domestication procedure more closely. The researcher took a qualitative approach to interpret the results. The materials were taken from the two interesting and entertaining animations: “*The Incredibles*” translated into "شگفت انگیزان" and “*Barnyard*”, translated into "رئیس مزرعه", both dubbed by *glory Entertainment Institue*.

The aforementioned cartoons were selected because the dubbers have applied, as Venuti puts it, a ‘transparent’ and ‘familiarized’ method of translation. The dubbed versions use a very natural and localized language which appears very amazing and funny to both children and adults. In order to examine the domestication procedure more closely, the researcher watched the two cartoons very carefully in both the original and dubbed versions. Then she extracted the problematic cases of domestication that seem to be inappropriate for children.

Discussion and Results

With regard to the first research question, we could say that domestication is very common in Persian dubbed versions of animations. The dubbers have even tried to localize the animated characters’ accents and dialects or sometimes they have added a dialect or accent which is absent in the English version. For instance, in “*The Incredibles*” Mr. Incredible’s close friend speaks *Abadani* which is an original accent of the south of Iran. Alternatively, in “*Barnyard*” the animal characters speak very informally in the dubbed version whereas in the original animation this informality could not be seen as much. Also, some characters speak with an added accent that does not exist in the English version. For example, both Ben, who controls the barnyard, and his son, Otis, speak in an old Tehrani accent, a type of language that has made the dubbed animation really hilarious. Otis also uses a lot of informal words and phrases in the dubbed version that are absent in the original. In general, in both animations, especially in “*Barnyard*”, dubbers have employed many domesticating features.

To address the second research question the researcher took a general look at the two animations and finally came to the following response: Apparently, domestication will help the young audience understand the language of the characters more easily. Dubbers have made determined effort to create a more tangible wording for children. This will allow for a less demanding attention from the young viewers. Another advantage of domestication in dubbing is the element of humor that is added to people’s language. To put simply, as a result of domestication, the characters have become more amusing and humorous in the dubbed version. A quick comparison of the two versions will indicate that in the original animations, the characters do not speak as interestingly and amusingly as in the dubbed version. This actually occurs to the extent that in some parts of the animation, the viewers cannot stop laughing. Moreover, this entertaining characteristic has made many adults fascinated in following the Persian dubbed animations.

In response to the third research question, the researcher compared the English and Persian animations and extracted some problematic cases of domestication. The two tables below shows these cases for each animation separately. The sign ___ shows that in English there have not been any words but the dubbers have added a phrase of their own in the Persian translation.

Table 1. Terms Extracted from “*The Incredible*”

The Original Version	The Persian Translation
Let go now	بی خیال دیگه

Take this one home	این وروجک رو بسپارین دست ننه ش
The injured jumper	یه دیوونه م اون بالاس
He starts this prepared speech	شروع کرد به وراجی کردن
It was on fire	بابا داشت می سوخت لاکردار
He starts monologue	هی ور میزنه
They will pay the nose to get it	باید پدرشون در بیاد
_____	بلا نسبت خره
_____	ول کن بابا با این کارات

Table 2. Items Extracted from “Barnyard”

The Original Version	The Persian Translation
_____	خاک بر سرت
Steer clear of Otis	شماها بهتره دور و بر اوتیس نپلکین. حله؟
_____	همین که شنفتی. هری
Haven't you seen otis?	بینم تو اوتیسو نیدی
Alright boys. Here's a dealio.	همه چی ردیفه
Hey pop. Look!	د بیا
Just take a seat.	ببند فک و یه جا بشین.
Let's hit it.	عرایض تمومه
Leaving out, walking quickly, walking out	خیلی خب، تا گیر نداده باهاس جلدی جیم شیم
Wrong number	اشتبب گرفته
They're coyotes.	چارنا شغال زپر تی فسقلی
Thank you. All right.	دمت گرم دیگه!
Got it. Locked in the vault.	همین دیگه. رفت تو ملاجم.
_____	زت زیاد
He's a real winner.	فکر میکنه خیلی بانمکه ارواح خیکش
Oh, leave him be.	گیر نده. ول کن
I'm not in charge, ok?	من اصلا ریخت این حرفا نیستم
The farmer is a good guy.	کشاورز مرد با عشقیه
Will you stop doing that?	به چه زبونی حالیت کنم؟
Stop it! Stop it!	فک بسته! فک بسته!
That's the animal sin of sins.	این خفن ترین عملیات حیوونیه
_____	خوف نکن. خوف نکن! به جوری می پیجونیمشون دیگه.
Hey relax. We can lose them.	هیچ غلطی نکردم
You're a big meanie.	تو خیلی پدرسوخته ای
What's this?	چه غلطاً؟
Just stick near me guys and you'll be alright.	نزدیک من بمونین. ردیف ردیفین.
I was having a little fun. I mean you should try it.	داشتم خوش میگذروندم، مگه چیه؟ خب توام بیا برو امتحان کن
Would you stop? Come on.	ول کن. عجب آویزونی هستی
It's not my responsibility.	این هندونه مال زیر بغل ما نیست. حالیه؟

As can be seen clearly, dubbers have employed the domestication procedure in “*Barnyard*” to a greater extent. The researcher believes that these phrases or sentences will exert a negative influence on the young audience. As Zitawi (2003) states, “children’s animations and programs not only serve as forms of entertainment, but also communicate positive learning messages such as what is acceptable behavior for children and the relaying of cultural values”. Although animations are produced to entertain children and make them have a lot of fun, they have some pedagogical goals to teach them suitable language and manners. The cases listed in the above tables are apparently showing that the language used in the dubbed version is not as appropriate for the young addresses as it should be. This issue becomes more noteworthy when you compare the English with the Persian equivalents. In most examples shown above, the English version uses a standard and ordinary wording whereas the Persian utilizes a language that seems to be impolite and disrespectful. Consider the examples below:

- Take this one home.

Persian translation: این وروجک رو بسپارین دست ننه ش

In the original version, Mr. Incredible uses this sentence when talking to police officers about the boy who has annoyed him recently. Although Mr. Incredible is very angry with the boy, he does not use an impolite language whereas in the dubbed version, unfortunately the dubbers have ignored this fact and translated the sentence very inappropriately.

- He starts monologue.

Persian translation: هی ور میزنه

Here again the type of language used is very different in Persian. The word “*monologue*” means giving a long speech (perhaps without any pauses). Although it may not have a positive meaning in English, it should not make the Persian dubbers employ a very negative equivalence in the target language.

- Just take a seat.

Persian translation: ببند فک و یه جا بشین.

In this example, Ben is speaking to his son who is late for the meeting in the barnyard. The English sentence is a standard statement that a father uses to speak to his son. However, the Persian equivalence is a very impolite way of addressing one’s child even if s/he has done something wrong.

- Thank you. All right.

Persian translation: دمت گرم دیگه!

- Got it. Locked in the vault.

Persian translation: همین دیگه. رفت تو ملاجم.

- I was having a little fun. I mean you should try it.

Persian translation: داشتم خوش میزدگروندم، مگه چیه؟ خب توام بیا برو امتحان کن

In all the three examples above, Otis is talking to his father. In many cultures, children should respect their parents and should not speak rudely to them. In Iranian culture too, respecting the superiors has always been emphasized by the society and culture. Yet, these statements indicate that the Persian equivalences are unsuitable to be used for young viewers.

These three examples and the previous example (Ben speaking to his son) will promote wrong behavior and unpleasant language among children. In fact, children who should learn to respect their parents from a very young age are encouraged to employ an improper and unacceptable language and behavior. Most words and phrases that are listed in table 1 and 2, belong to a special group of people in society who are willing to use slangs very often, the language of hooligans and scoundrels who are not really concerned about their manners and their selection of words. In other words, dubbers and translators should not confuse the use of slangs with domestication. Also, they should not employ domestication only to make people laugh and disregard appropriate language and culture that should be taught to children indirectly by means of animations.

Concluding remarks

This study focused on the domestication strategy which was introduced into the field of translation by Venuti (1995). It was mentioned that many experts in the field have favored domestication over foreignization because it creates a simple, fluent, and invisible translation. Despite the advantages of domestication procedure, we argued that this technique can be harmful to children. Translators and dubbers should be more considerate about the way they apply methods of translation. They should be concerned about the addresses of translation (or dubbed programs) and ought not to sacrifice the standard language for the sake of domestication. They should keep in mind that children's programs need to pay deserved attention to pedagogical principles and values. Therefore, when domesticating words, phrases, or sentences in children's programs and animations, they have to give this factor due consideration.

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