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Exploring the Attitudes and Expectations of Iranian Audiences in Terms of Professional Dubbing into Persian

Abstract

For more than seven decades, dubbing has been the dominant professional modality for overcoming language barriers in foreign movies and TV series in Iran and has been revered as a national art. Although limited, some recent work has explored Persian dubbing reception and to continue this endeavor, this study attempts to offer further insights into how the Iranian viewers perceive dubbing, translation for dubbing and what they expect from dubbing. More precisely, the study aims at examining how the Iranian audiences view dubbing and particularly its agents and translation. To these ends, a questionnaire including open and closed items was designed. The overall results revealed that translation quality was considered considerably less important than the technical issues related to the dubbing production, such as voice-acting and synchronization. The findings also suggested that the performance of dubbing actors and dubbing directors was regarded more important than the contribution of translators. Overall, these findings seemed to indicate that the Iranian viewers' appreciation of a dubbed program is mainly guided by non-translation issues including the performance of the dubbing actors and the accuracy of the relevant synchronizations.

Keywords

dubbing; reception; dubbing translators; dubbing actors; Iranian viewers; attitudes; expectations

1. Introduction

The number of audiovisual programs has increased worldwide and thanks to audiovisual translation (AVT), many of these productions are now being consumed far outside their original borders. It has been argued that the audiovisual entertaining market in the past three decades has witnessed a shift towards “consumer-centric strategies” (Esser et al. 2016: 1) where the significant role of audiences in the world of cinema is foregrounded. In the same line of argument, it is claimed that audiences are at “the center of public opinion in a competitive global market” (Chiaro 2014: 206). In the case of AVT, in-depth knowledge about the audiences as viewers of translated programs is scarce, as viewers have not been well-researched in the domain of AVT, at least outside Europe, rendering this claim unfounded. When it comes to dubbing, relatively little research has been conducted in comparison with subtitling (Díaz Cintas 2016: xiii), let alone empirically grounded research into dubbing reception (Chaume 2013a: 294) and it is therefore all the more important.

Consequently, this academic gap motivates more investigation so that a better understanding of the viewers' needs and perspectives could be obtained. Iranian AVT researchers (Ameri et al. 2015, 2018, Khoshsaligheh et al. 2018) have recently started to examine Persian dubbing reception and they have called for more research into this emerging area. As such, this study aims at contributing to the study of dubbing reception by investigating current attitudes, tendencies and expectations of Iranian audiences of Persian dubbing. As the investigation is qualitative in nature, the findings cannot be generalized. Rather, they can be used as an input for generating hypothesis for new studies of a larger scale or of different groups of viewers. Also, the results can help

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enhance our understanding of the way dubbed products are received by the Iranian viewers and, consequently, to inform the AVT industry.

2. Theoretical framework and previous research

Before describing the research, the method and the findings of the study, the following section offers a brief account of dubbing and reviews the relevant literature on dubbing reception.

2.1. Dubbing

Before the introduction of dubbing in the Iranian society in the mid-1940s, the live screen translator, known as *Dilmaj*¹, and intertitles were the main means for translating both silent and sound movies. Dubbing was born in the Iranian society when the French comedy, *Premier Rendez-Vous*, was shown with Persian dubbing. The choice of dubbing (rather than subtitling) was the result of the widespread illiteracy of the Iranian public (Zhirafar 2014).

Since then, dubbing has remained the sole (official) choice of AVT in Iran and is used for fiction content in all national TV channels as well as home entertainment DVDs on the market. Professional subtitling never actually gained popularity, even though the fairly recent, increasingly widespread phenomenon of Persian fansubbing or non-professional subtitling cannot be ignored. The fansubbers subtitle almost everything since all original movies and TV series are not lucky enough to pass through the official ‘cultural gatekeeping’ to be dubbed in Iran (Khoshsaligheh et al. in press, Ameri 2017). Emerging online streaming services like *filmnet.ir* also show dubbed movies and TV series only. Additionally, Persian-language satellite TV channels such as *GEM TV* broadcast almost all their TV series and movies in Persian dubbing. Taken as a whole, the Iranians’ constant exposure to dubbing rather than to any other AVT modalities is indisputable even though these viewing experiences may change in the years to come. Another development in the AVT industry is the shift in the Persian dubbing landscape, in which streaming services (e.g. *filmnet.ir* and *namava.ir*) have been actively dubbing newly released blockbusters, as opposed to the dubbing practice on official TV channels which is subject to lengthy delays, if ever dubbed at all (Khoshsaligheh/Ameri 2016).

The process of dubbing in Iran proceeds through several stages, according to Abolhasan Tahami (2011), an Iranian well-known dubbing director (and a literary translator). After the dialogues of the program have been translated, the translated dialogues are delivered to the dubbing director who is responsible for synchronizing – isochrony, lip synchrony and kinetic synchrony (Chaume 2012) – the translation draft by revising and editing it, and for preparing ‘credible’ dialogues for the dubbing cast. Once the synchronization process ends, the dubbing director copies the dialogues into a dialogue sheet. Another stage concerns voice selection, in which the dubbing director chooses the dubbing actors whose voice characteristically fits the original actors. At the day of the recording of the dialogues, a copy of the dialogues is given to the dubbing actors and they perform their role under the assistance and direction of the dubbing director. The sound engineer records the performed dialogues by the dubbing actors and mixes them with the international sound track which accompanies the product. If the international sound track is not available, similar matching sound effects are acquired from an archive of sounds (Tahami 2011).

Synchronization – a constraint, but also an important factor in the dubbing production – can greatly affect the translation process and reception of the final product (Chaume 2012, Tahami 2011). Empirical research, for example, has shown that ‘poorly synched lips’ can distract the viewers’ attention and concentration and hamper their viewing process (Smith et al. 2014). This is why synchronization has been widely discussed in studies of dubbing (Chaume 2012) and has been strongly emphasized in the process of dubbing (Tahami 2011).

¹ The screen translators or *Dilmajs* were narrators who offered translation, commentary and interpretation of the original programs (either silent movies or talkies) in the cinema by standing next to the screen so as to make the program meaningful and understandable to the Iranian audience (Naficy 2011).

Dubbing has been known as a covert translation or invisible translation because the viewers have no access to the original dialogue track, which makes it difficult for them to evaluate the translation against the original text (O’Connell 2007). However, this seems to be a simplistic understanding of the viewership in the present digital era, as the original film is only one click away from the reach of the audience. Also, through the Internet, Iranian users have unlimited access to illegal websites which pirate the dialogue sound track of professional dubbings broadcast on national TV channels and add it to the original program, creating a program with multiple audio tracks. Such pirated products are presented with two audio tracks – both original and dubbing tracks – and the audience can easily run a comparison between the two if they wish.

Although synchronization and translation, and consequently the synchronization of the translation, are distinguishing features of dubbing, the translation for dubbing remains invisible and it is the synchronization which captures the attention of the audience despite the fact that synchronization is made possible by means of appropriate translation. Furthermore, ‘character synchrony’, is not much affected by translation, but is certainly achieved by dubbing actors’ ‘dramatizations’ and should be the concern of the dubbing director and dubbing actors (Chaume 2012).

Another aspect of Persian dubbing, or perhaps of all dubbings on the globe, is that translators are hardly ever credited and remain invisible agents. But when it comes to dubbing directors and dubbing actors, they are usually credited on the program and almost all interviews with the dubbing agents have been conducted with either dubbing directors or actors rather than with the involved translators. This may give the impression that the quality of dubbing is exclusively achieved by dubbing directors and dubbing actors. Notwithstanding the right selection of dubbing actors alongside accurate synchronization in guaranteeing the positive reception of the dubbed program (Bosseaux 2015: 65; Chaume 2012: 36; Sánchez Mompeán 2015: 288), there is no empirical evidence to show whether synchronization and voice-acting and the agents engaged with them are viewed more important than the translation and the translators, in the viewers’ point of view.

2.2. Quality standards in dubbing

A universally-acknowledged purpose of dubbing is to make a program which sounds real and believable and “tricks us as viewers into thinking we are witnessing a credible story, with easily recognized characters and realistic voices” (Chaume 2012: 20). Such quality in dubbing can be guaranteed provided that ample empirical evidence about producers and viewers is provided (Chiaro 2014). Chaume (2007: 74-75) conceptually presents an outline of quality standards in dubbing including the following as the priorities:

- Preserving different synchrony techniques including lip-synchrony, isochrony and kinetic synchrony;
- Writing credible, realistic and natural dialogues based on the norms and conventions of the target language;
- Preserving coherence and agreement between what is heard and seen as well as the internal cohesion and coherence between dialogues;
- Persevering faithfulness to the original in terms of content, form, function and effects;
- Achieving a good sound quality; the dubbing product should be without any kind of background noise like the sounds produced in the dubbing studio as well as the original dialogue track;
- Performing a natural voice-acting by dubbing actors, which does not sound unnatural or

exaggerated.

In addition, there are other factors which may affect the reception of dubbed products. If the dubbing actors, for instance, become too well-known to the public within one program or across several programs, the viewers may get confused when hearing original actors with different voices in the target language (Meyer-Dinkgräfe 2006, Avila 1997 cited in Chaume 2012: 20). It is really difficult to express which dubbing aspects or quality standards should be given priority without having enough evidence from the industry producers and audiences. Some, however, ascribe great value to “believable, convincing dialogue” (Whitman-Linsen 1992 cited in Baños 2017: 476). However, Abolhasan Tahami (2011) is of the view that voice-acting is of central importance in dubbing. For this renowned Iranian dubbing director, other factors, including translation and synchronization, are of ancillary function and simply serve to elevate the voice-acting to the highest possible quality.

However, as mentioned above, the main purpose of this paper is to present an investigation of viewers’ expectations of dubbing. To this purpose, Chaume’s (2007) tentative model of dubbing quality standards counts as a starting point, which will be described in section 4.13. As section 3 describes, the participants in the study are viewers who comment and voice their concerns with regard to dubbing on online social networks (i.e. Facebook). Thus, following Filieri (2016), in this paper, this kind of communication is called ‘online consumer reviews’. The next section elaborates on such reviews.

2.3. Online consumer reviews

Thanks to the democratization of technology, consumers have been empowered to voice and share their opinions regarding products or services on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram or even blogs, also referred to as ‘online consumer reviews’ (Filieri 2016). Persian dubbing has not been an exception in this regard, as user-generated comments are common on the Internet. Although the discourse and comments in their own right could be a rich source of data for examining the consumers’ receptions, we will argue that the users form an autonomous class of viewers with their own specific features. As will be illustrated in the results section, the participants’ expectations are fairly similar to those found by Ameri et al. (2015), who examined a purposive sample of Iranian dubbing viewers who were mostly involved in the dubbing industry or were very avid viewers of dubbing. They commented, for example, on specific issues such as the competences required for dubbing actors and dubbing directors. Therefore, these consumers are not considered ‘lay’ who watch media products only for entertainment purposes (see Guillory 2000). Rather, these dubbing viewers voice their personal attitudes for or against Persian dubbing, which seem to suggest that entertainment is not their sole purpose when watching an audiovisual program. In other words, they also engage in discussing and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the dubbed program. Hence, this study focused on a group of Iranian dubbing viewers who had expressed their attitudes and made comments on Facebook pages devoted to Persian dubbing.

2.4. Reception and dubbing

Since the 1990s, dubbing has been investigated from a reception angle, but true research did not begin to take shape till the mid-2000s with the work by Italian and Spanish scholars. For example, Fuentes Luque (2003) explored the reaction of viewers to verbal and allusive humor in the Spanish dubbing and subtitling of the film *Duck Soup* and he found that the dubbed version impressed the viewers more than the subtitled version did. In an Italian case study, Chiaro (2004) examined the reception of verbally expressed humor in Italian dubbing and it was found that a large number of the viewers failed to understand the humor. In a different article, Antonini (2008) examined the reception of culture-specific, language-specific and lingua-cultural references in Italian dubbing and it was shown that a great number of the viewers did not really understand these references

in the translation and most viewers expressed a positive attitude towards Italian dubbing quality. Bucaria and Chiaro (2007) also showed that Italian viewers of dubbing had a very low level of understanding and appreciation of the cultural references.

In the past few years, a different group of studies on dubbing reception has started to appear. Perego et al. (2015), for instance, made a substantial contribution to the current AVT knowledge by comparing the reception of Italian dubbing and subtitling in terms of cognitive and evaluative aspects. The overall outcome of the research suggested that the reception of subtitling is not necessarily more cognitively demanding than dubbing. Additionally, in another study with the same focus, but this time with the support of eye-tracking, Perego et al. (2016) showed that there is no significant difference in the reception of dubbing and subtitling in terms of cognitive and evaluative aspects unless the program is linguistically, structurally or narratively complex. An eye-tracking study exclusively on Spanish dubbing and the English original was conducted by Di Giovanni and Romero Fresco (2016), who showed that dubbing viewers avoided looking at the characters' mouths and shifted their focus to the characters' eyes. Last but not least, a dubbing reception study was carried out in the form of a doctoral dissertation on children's reception of translated culture specific references and songs (Reyes Lozano 2015).

On the whole, it seems evident from this review that, presently, the research scope has been expanded to encompass experimental studies so as to help untangle some reception complexities. These investigations have offered valuable evidence about how the participants understand, perceive and watch dubbed products and laid the important groundwork for dubbing reception studies. However, there is still a need for developing reception studies, especially of attitudes, opinions and expectations of the audiences in communities like Iran, where less research on AVT has emerged.

2.5. Dubbing viewers' expectations

Risku et al. (2017) hold the view that translation client expectations – the viewers in the context of dubbing, – have not yet been the focus of existing studies². The term 'expectation' can be included in Chesterman's (2016) 'expectancy norm', that is, the expectations a consumer of translation might hold with regard to, among others, lexical or stylistic choices (Chesterman 2016: 62). It should be borne in mind that the dubbing viewer plays a very minor role in the process of dubbing and expectations are typically determined by the commissioner, say TV channels. As a result, academic research on viewers' expectations is required with the ultimate goal of informing the industry. A review of translation studies literature in general shows that users' expectations have been mainly surveyed in interpreting, technical translation and marketing communications materials. To the best of our knowledge, there are only two empirical studies on dubbing viewers' expectations. The study by Ameri et al. (2015) has qualitatively explored what the 'avid' viewers of dubbing might expect from a dubbed program, but it was limited to only 15 viewers who were users of a Persian blog devoted to dubbing. This study found that viewers' expectations revolved around five key areas, namely, dubbing actors, translation, translators, dubbing directors, and a final area, called 'other norms', included crediting the dubbing agents and no visual censorship. It is quite surprising that participants commented on the competences required by the agents involved in the process of dubbing. According to the authors, this was because the blog users also included dubbing agents such as dubbing actors, dubbing directors, among others. Therefore, they probably had professional or specialized knowledge of dubbing and their viewing process was motivated, not only by pleasure, but also by reflection, as they, on occasions, carefully view a dubbed product from varying perspectives including the quality of voice-acting.

² In Iran, the dubbing viewers are not the same as the translation client. In fact, TV channels or public TV stations are the main clients which commission a dubbing studio to do the dubbing of an original program. Viewers are the final end-users.

Another study with a similar focus was quantitatively carried out in Iran, but, in this case, the participants were university students. The outcome of the survey suggested five types of expectations: technicality, agents, faithfulness, censorship and domestication. The findings of this survey study by Ameri et al. (2018) revealed that technical issues, like different types of synchrony, are of utmost importance to the viewers. Translation issues such as faithfulness, naturalness, cohesion and coherence between the dialogues were also indicated as considerably significant. However, the highest rated expectations were mainly about dubbing actors' characteristics like character synchrony and voice quality. Taken together, the results of the two studies reveal that, in addition to translation, there are other issues which might be deemed important by the viewers. This is exactly in agreement with the dubbing quality standards outlined by Chaume (2007), where the set was not exclusively limited to translation, highlighting the true nature of dubbing as a multimodal form of translation. In this extended research, we focus on a group of Iranian viewers of dubbing who have shared their attitudes and opinions online.

3. Method

This study is informed by a survey of Iranian viewers of dubbing and was conducted during a period of approximately two months. The participants were recruited by means of Facebook for two reasons. First, it would make it possible to include viewers from across Iran – rather than being limited to a convenience sample of audiences from the city where the study was based. Second, the primary aim was to have a special group of dubbing viewers – those who regularly watch dubbed programs and frequently comment on social networks about Persian dubbing. Facebook, as a huge social media network, hosts several pages and groups devoted to Persian dubbing such as: (a) the Art of Dubbing³; (b) Glory Dubbing⁴; (c) Avazheh Dubbing⁵; and (d) the Art of Dubbing⁶. When the page or group creates upload new posts, users can add their comments on the posts. Since the pages are about dubbing, people with a keen interest in dubbing are naturally attracted. Therefore, the participants were chosen among those users who commented on the posts and shared their attitudes. As mentioned earlier, the consumers share their ideas and opinions online and, therefore, social media networks are a reasonable place for exploring ideas.

On 18 March 2015, the first author started inviting potential participants by sending a message to their Facebook profile. From 18 March 2015 to 16 April 2015, a total of 272 messages were sent out to invite the selected Facebook users to take part in the survey⁷. Among these, only 81 Facebook users agreed to contribute to the study. The questionnaire, which was in Persian, was sent to their Facebook account – through the Facebook messenger platform – as well as to their email addresses. In total, in the period from 18 March 2015 to 25 April 2015, 67 questionnaires were completed, leading to a response rate just over 24%. The 67 participants were between 17 and 63 years old (with an average age of 32.3): 21 women and 46 men. In order to get a clearer image of the sample of the study, the contributors were also asked if they were possibly engaged with the dubbing industry, and 13 of the participants replied that they were.

In many studies, especially with an experimental design, homogenous samples which are controlled in terms of the variable of age is preferable or even quite necessary. However, considering the purpose of this survey – which falls within an observational research paradigm –, a heterogeneous sample of dubbing viewers with a diverse range of ages seemed more useful in gaining insight into the issues under investigation. Also, given the limited number of participants volunteering to contribute to the study, controlling the variable of age could have decreased the sample size significantly. Therefore, for purposive and practical reasons, no limiting criterion was set

3 <http://b2n.ir/77497> [Last accessed 24 May 2015]

4 <https://www.facebook.com/GloryFilm?ref=ts&fref=ts> [Last accessed 24 May 2015]

5 <https://www.facebook.com/avajeh.studio?fref=nf> [Last accessed 24 May 2015]

6 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/120563351345038/?ref=ts&fref=ts> [Last accessed 24 May 2015]

7 The aim was to send out as many invitations as possible. We managed to send out 272 invitations.

for the age of the participants in this project. Future research with more tightly controlled designs could examine larger homogenous samples to reveal if age is a significant variable in this regard.

The questionnaire comprised two parts: a demographic information part and the main questions part. The main part contained 13 questions including ten closed-ended questions and three open-ended questions. The open-ended questions asked the respondents to name a dubbing translator, to give reasons for (not) preferring professional subtitling and to discuss their expectations of Persian dubbing. The closed-ended questions concerned the reasons for watching dubbing, their familiarity with dubbing translators, their attitudes towards the overall quality of translation and dubbing technicalities, their attention to translation and synchronization, among others. Several closed-ended questions included an optional item in which the participants could add responses which were not included in the available options. This was very useful for collecting more qualitative data and to gain more diverse insights into the issue (see Appendix A for an English version of the instrument).

The data were mainly of a qualitative nature, but contained a quantitative component. The analysis of the qualitative data was a so-called “thematic analysis” (Braun/Clarke 2006), in which the data were categorized according to main themes. The analysis of the quantitative data, in turn, was carried out by descriptive statistics using frequency and percentage calculation of the survey responses.

4. Findings

In what follows, the responses to each of the questionnaire items are reported and discussed. As can be seen in the appendix, items 5, 12 and 13 were open types for which the participants could write down their answers in any length, while the rest of the items were closed-ended questions.

4.1. Reasons for watching dubbing

The first question asked why the participants preferred to watch dubbed programs. Out of the six available options (see Appendix A), the respondents picked out only two options: the enjoyment of watching a dubbed program (67.16%⁸) and the ease of watching a dubbed program (10.44%). Enjoyment appears to be an important reason for choosing a dubbed program. A possible explanation is that dubbing can be less cognitively demanding in particular if the program is complex (Perego et al. 2016) and partly because the Iranian participants have grown up with dubbing. Yet, this was not the case for all the participants as the results show.

No other options were chosen by the participants, which is probably due to the fact that people now have access to the original programs and their (non-professional) subtitles. As mentioned above, original movies and TV series are not officially presented in Iran and only their dubbed versions are available; however, the pirated products are easily available on the Internet or can be purchased unofficially for very low prices. This is part of the reason why our participants did not select other options. Some participants mentioned other reasons for preferring dubbing, such as distraction caused by subtitles in the viewing session, the joy of dubbing actors’ pleasing voices, learning the techniques of voice-acting, losing the director’s and actors’ techniques when reading subtitles, having sight defects, and being able to multitask when watching dubbed programs. A review of the comments revealed that some viewers are distracted by subtitles. Although this disadvantage has been questioned and challenged by Perego et al. (2015), the distracting potential of subtitling for the participants of this study makes more sense if considering that Iranians are only exposed to non-professional subtitling with its questionable quality both technically and translation-wise. All in all, in addition to the factor of enjoyment as the main motivation, people seem to be attracted to watch dubbed programs because of occupational reasons, or due to the distract-

⁸ When participants select more than one or two alternatives (in questions 1, 3, 8 and 9), the numbers do not total a 100 percent.

tions of reading subtitles. One of the participants also mentioned vision impairment as a reason for preferring dubbing.

4.2. Attention to translation in dubbing

The second question asked to what extent the participants noticed the phrasing of the dialogues in a dubbed program. As shown in Table 1, all the participants stated that they noticed the translation, but to varying degrees. Nobody claimed not to care about the translation of the dubbed programs. Although this finding cannot be generalized to the Iranian audience in general, it does give support to the assumption that translation is quite important for the viewers.

4.3. Reasons of attention to the translation

The third question asked why the participants noticed the phrasing of the dialogues in a dubbed program. Many of the viewers marked the importance of the translated text in dubbing (41.79%), while 31 percent would like to compare the translation with its original content to keep an eye out for possible errors and manipulations. A few (8.59%), however, mistrusted the translated text. The sample of the study was composed of viewers who are avid viewers of dubbing or are from the industry and their intention for watching dubbed programs was not just motivated by enjoyment, as they commented online on dubbing. As a result, the findings might differ in other groups of viewers and it should not be neglected that the importance of translation does not include only a comparison with the original content but also the translation itself. This may include its naturalness, idiomaticity and so on.

Attention to Translation	Percentage / Number
Extremely high	34.33% / 23
High	47.76% / 32
Average	10.45% / 7
Little	7.46% / 5
No attention	0

Table 1. Attention to translation

In addition to the figures discussed here, some participants added others reasons. For instance, comparing several dubbings of the same product to detect differences and similarities. And finally, for one participant, translation was one of the significant pillars of dubbing; “Let’s remember films like *The Sound of Music*. The songs of this film were also translated and performed adequately or translation of the film *Hamlet* which was a masterpiece in film translation in Iran”.

4.4. Familiarity with dubbing translators

Translators have been labeled invisible agents (Venuti, 1998). This is very true in the Iranian AVT system where they are hardly ever credited, especially in dubbings for TV channels, as noted above. To examine this issue from the perspective of the viewers, the fourth question asked to what extent the participants are familiar with dubbing translators. While a large number of the participants, as can be seen in Table 2, agreed that they know dubbing translators, the level of familiarity varies from high to not at all. And a glance at the results reveals that translators are not very well-known to the sampled viewers. Perhaps because the translators are not credited.

4.5. Recalling the name of one dubbing translator

The previous questions showed that only a restricted number of the participants are familiar with dubbing translators. Question 5 asked the participants to write the name of a dubbing translator.

Interestingly, 70.14% of the participants could report the name of at least one translator. In this regard, some names of translators were mentioned frequently, namely: Hossein Shayegan, Amir Hushang Zand, Masoud Miresmaili, and Omid Golchin. This might be due to the used criterion in participant selection since they were all recruited from among avid viewers and not from among the general public. It is also worth remembering that a small number of the respondents (19.40%) were involved in the dubbing industry. They all managed to write at least one dubbing translator's name. Therefore, the percentage, without counting the agents in the dubbing industry, is 50.74.

The Level of Familiarity	Percentage / Number
Extremely high	7.46% / 5
High	14.93% / 10
Average	23.88% / 16
Little	37.31% / 25
Not at All	16.42% / 11

Table 2. Familiarity with dubbing translators

Moreover, some Iranian dubbing companies, including *Avazheh* and *Glory Entertainment*, have profiles on Facebook. Whenever these companies advertise a new dubbed product on their Facebook pages, they also list the name of agents, including that of the translator. So the participants might know the names of these translators in this way. It is interesting to note that Masoud Miresmaili and Omid Golchin are the translators of *Avazheh* dubbing group, Amir Hushang Zand is also the well-known translator of *the Century 21 Visual Media Company* and Hossein Shayegan is the prominent translator in national TV channels. Thus, this suggests that our participants only know few ones although there are many other translators, apart from those, who were not mentioned at all in the responses.

4.6. The quality of translation

Another point of interest related to dubbing is the quality of its translation, which is the object of the sixth asked question. In the questionnaire, we did not limit the definition of translation quality to any criteria and we only mentioned that by translation we mean the target language, i.e. what is heard from the actors because translation quality encompasses an endless list of criteria, which can create confusion among the participants.

Level of Quality	Percentage / Number
Excellent Quality	4.48% / 3
Good Quality	50.75% / 34
Fair Quality	35.82% / 24
Poor Quality	2.98% / 2
No Opinion	5.97% / 4

Table 3. Translation quality

Generally, the participants evoked a positive attitude towards the translation. More than half of the participants were satisfied with the translation of the dubbed programs. A large number, however, did not show a positive attitude (Table 3). In other words, fair quality and poor quality were chosen by more than 35 percent of the participants and this cannot be ignored.

4.7. The quality of dubbing

Since the quality of dubbing – say the voice talent’s performance – , like that of the translation, can be influenced by many factors and variables (Chaume, 2007), in the questionnaire, we did not limit its definition to any specific criteria. In the seventh question, the participants were asked to rate the current quality of dubbing. On the whole, they were satisfied with the dubbing quality. Nevertheless, fair quality and poor quality were also chosen by more than 32 percent of the participants (Table 4). The general trend appears to be that Persian dubbing does not suffer from poor quality from the perspective of the viewers, but at the same time it does not enjoy a high quality either.

Level of Quality	Percentage / Number
Excellent Quality	16.42% / 11
Good Quality	46.27% / 31
Fair Quality	32.83% / 22
Poor Quality	1.50% / 1
No Opinion	2.98% / 2

Table 4. Dubbing quality

4.8. Translator, dubbing director or dubbing actors?

In the Iranian dubbing process, as discussed earlier, three agents have a key role: the translator, the dubbing director and the dubbing actors. Question 8 was raised to gain knowledge as to which dubbing agent the viewers mostly pay attention to when choosing or watching a dubbed program. Dubbing actors were considered to be more important (by 65.67% of the respondents) than the other agents and a dubbing director was regarded more influential (50.75%) than a translator (19.40%). An obvious reason may be that the viewer has a visual impression of the actor; the translator is per definition invisible. This also means that the dubbing viewers pay more attention to the dubbing actors than to the dubbing director and translator.

A small number of the participants (19.40%), however, considered translators important. It is worth indicating that, in this question, the participants were permitted to choose more than one item. Hence, some participants selected all agents if they felt unable to differentiate between them. What can be inferred from these figures is that dubbing actors and directors, in the eyes of the viewers, probably play a significant role in achieving a high quality in dubbing. This also supports what was said previously: that these two agents have always been the attention of dubbing critics and almost all interviews available about Persian dubbing have been conducted with dubbing actors and dubbing directors, while less has been said about dubbing translators.

4.9. Translation, synchrony or voice-acting?

Question 9 was related to Question 8, but this time we asked our participants about the task the agents carry out in the process of dubbing, that is, if they pay attention to translation, synchronization or voice-acting. In the Iranian dubbing industry, as indicated previously, the synchronization is done by the dubbing director and the translator only offers an accurate translation which, then, is used by the dubbing actors when performing voice-acting. Here, we did not differentiate between different types of synchrony (isochrony, lip synchrony and kinetic synchrony) and only provided the participants with three options, namely: translation, synchronization and voice-acting (or typecasting). As could be predicted – based on the results of the previous question – a very large number of the participants (76.12%) chose voice-acting. Around half of them (49.25%) chose synchronization, which is the task of the dubbing director in Iran. Translation, in turn, did not attain a high percentage (32.83%). Interestingly, few participants stated that they mainly pay

attention to the general quality of dubbing and one person said the quality of sound mixing is another important criterion.

4.10. Generating professional subtitling?

In Question 10, we were interested in finding out if the participants would prefer Iran to produce professional subtitling in addition to dubbing. Less than half of the participants (46.27%) agreed on this proposal, and the rest did not agree. This finding shows that, although Iranians have grown up with dubbing, there is also an interest in subtitling in the group of participants.

4.11. Excluding dubbing?

In Question 11, the participants were asked whether they would prefer Iran to stop producing dubbing and to start producing professional subtitling instead. All participants disagreed with the idea of the full replacement of dubbing with subtitling.

4.12. Why dubbing or subtitling?

In Question 12, the participants were asked to give reasons for their responses to the two previous questions (10 and 11). The reasons for preferring professional subtitling alongside dubbing were mainly concerned with language learning, accessibility (for the deaf and hard of hearing), and the authenticity and feeling of the real, which subtitling presents, among others. As noted before, all the participants rejected the idea of full replacement of dubbing with subtitling and they justified their choice by referring to the art of Persian dubbing and its excellent profession in Iran, accessibility for children, subtitling as a ‘vulnerable translation’ occupying the viewer’s mind with comparing translation against the original (Díaz Cintas/Remael 2007), and distractions made by subtitles. Additionally, one of the participants believed that “[subtitling] ruins the meaning of compositions, emotional reactions [...] since the viewers would always occupy themselves with reading the subtitles and find no chance to enjoy the film and its techniques. Importantly, the viewers should be able to read very fast”. To sum up, both subtitling and dubbing seemed to have their own fans with specific reasons for their choice.

4.13. Viewers’ expectations from dubbing

The last question of the questionnaire asked what characteristics the participants think a dubbed program should have for them to enjoy it. Since this question required the participants to provide detailed answers, only 48 participants (71.64%) responded to this question. The data obtained were analyzed and coded through ‘thematic analysis’ (Braun/Clarke 2006). After collecting all the responses and reviewing them in order to get a general picture of the data, the thematic analysis protocol was adopted to identify the prominent themes concerning the viewers’ expectations. The initial stage of the analysis began with looking for patterns in the data and it was attempted to code all the relevant segments. After the first round of reading and reviewing, the data and all the extracts received an initial code which was labeled. In the second round of reading and reviewing the initially generated codes, attempts were made to combine the generated codes to form one potential theme and to label it. After reviewing and revising the themes, the final map of our data was produced (see Appendix B). In brief, the results showed that the participants’ expectations could be grouped into four main categories of expectations: voice-acting, translation, dubbing directing, and dubbing studios. Appendix B shows a sample segment of data analysis. The far-left column of the table contains the main themes, the central column includes the codes (or sub-categories) concerning the main themes and, in the far-right column, extracts from the data (translated from Persian) can be seen.

Overall, as is evident in the sample of the data, the above-mentioned expectations were not limited to translation and the respondents brought voice-acting and synchronization to the fore, too.

Some issues were repeatedly mentioned in the data: voice-acting and dubbing directing. This, to some extent, matches the results achieved in the previous questions where the role of the dubbing actors and dubbing directors was deemed more important than that of the translator. However, comments about translators and translations were also made. An interesting point with regard to this question is that, while we only asked about expectations, some participants directed their responses towards criticizing the Persian dubbing for its pitfalls.

To summarize, for the participants, characterization – the way the original actors' voices are performed in the dubbing – and voice qualities – as the two sub-categories of voice-acting – were deemed important. They want to watch a dubbed program done by professional and experienced dubbing actors who understand the role they are revoicing well so that their performance sounds real and authentic. Such a performance should reflect the true personality of the character in question and this is made possible when the original character's feelings are well-understood and grasped by the dubbing actor. Such an expectation makes sense because it is the performance that conveys the impression of who the original actors are and it affects the audience's understating of "characters' point of view, their inner states, thoughts and emotions" (Bosseaux 2015: 54).

As far as translation was concerned, the participants reported that accuracy and faithfulness matter a lot to them as they do not like to watch a dubbed program which suffers from much dialogue censorship and manipulation. Similarly, Chaume (2007: 85) emphasizes that at the present time viewers do not condone "phenomena such as political, religious or sexual censorship". In addition to this, they also mentioned naturalness – the Persian structures and lexicon employed in the translation. The translation, for them, should not appear foreign or 'as a translated dialogue'; it should be idiomatic. It seems to us that the participants were mainly concerned with naturalness rather than domestication since they did not mention any domesticating strategies. Although familiarity with source and target languages is a basic competence that each translator must hold, our participants took one further step and mentioned that translators should have lived in the country where the original language of the program is spoken. This may be due to the fact that a few distinguished Iranian dubbing translators lived in countries like England. Such expectations seem ideal, but are not always be feasible.

Another theme that emerged from the analysis was dubbing directors' responsibilities or dubbing directing. Synchronization appeared to be a key element when they were talking about this theme. Indeed, this keystone of dubbing was an important feature that the participants expected from the dubbing. The participants showed concerns with regard to favoritism in selecting the dubbing actors and the overuse of certain actors. The truth is that there is not a great selection of dubbing actors in Iran and the dubbing directors do not always take the risk of employing the newly-entered actors in the dubbing industry. Thus, they mainly work with a specific group of dubbing actors and, as noted previously, the dubbing viewers' attention is widely attracted by the dubbing actors. This expectation has also been highlighted by Avila (1997, cited in Chaume, 2012: 20), who notes that "the same voices should not be overused within the same production and across multiple films". Tahami (2011) shares the same idea and notes that using similar voices within a dubbing program should be avoided and each voice should differ from the other voices so as to foster character identification for the viewer.

Another expectation concerns the writing of good dialogues for the dubbing cast, which is the responsibility of the dubbing director in Iran, but the translator could also help. As the participants said, the dubbing dialogues should be perfect and fresh or, in the words of Chaume (2012: 15), they should sound "credible and realistic".

The issues discussed so far mainly addressed the duties of three main agents in the Persian dubbing process. The last theme found in the data concerned the dubbing studios. Due to the ideology practiced and advocated in the Iranian society and media, 'selective appropriation' is a main strategy when selecting materials for dubbing. This issue was criticized by several participants as they wanted their favorite movies and TV series to be dubbed. Another related issue was visual censorship and scene omission, which is a common part of Persian dubbing practice. This was

not acceptable to the participants of this survey. A problem which was raised by one participant, who was also a dubbing actor, was the low payment. For her, the low payment is the root of many problems in this industry, the less the dubbing actors are paid, the less they are motivated to work hard for what they are given.

All in all, the qualitative findings show what our participants expect from dubbing. The expectations, to some extent, are in agreement with the dubbing quality standards introduced by Chaume (2007). The data suggest that the viewers care about the quality and it matters to them what they watch.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The ultimate goal of this article was to report on a survey exploring the reception habits among a select group of Iranian dubbing viewers. It also examined what the audiences expect from a dubbed program, rather than subtitles. The results evidently support the assumption that the viewers' attitudes, especially their expectations, are not exclusively influenced by the quality of the translational aspect of dubbing because the respondents mentioned non-translation issues such as voice-acting.

The overall findings revealed that the effortless enjoyment appears to be the main motivation for preferring dubbed programs. The Iranian society has been extensively exposed to a large number of dubbed products and is naturally more accustomed to dubbing than to subtitling or voice-over. Another motivation are the assumed disadvantages of subtitling. It was revealed that some participants mentioned the so-called drawbacks of subtitling including distraction and the necessity of being a good and fast reader. This problem is not surprising: firstly, the Iranian people have always been exposed to dubbing in the absence of any professional subtitling. Secondly, programs available under the name of subtitling are in fact fansubbing – a practice which usually renders almost everything the original characters utter, verbatim, not to mention the addition of notes and commentaries, which increases the required cognitive load of reading subtitles due to the necessity for reading faster (Chaume 2013b). Consequently, loss of information and distractions are often inevitable. Recent reception studies (Perego et al. 2015 and Perego et al. 2016) have offered empirical evidence to the effect that subtitling is not necessarily demanding or ineffective — unless the program is complex. However, as such research concerns professional subtitling in selected European contexts, the results cannot be extended to locales like Iran, where subtitles have a different status altogether. It should be mentioned, though, that the data analysis showed that a large group of participants supported the idea of introducing professional subtitling in Iran. This tendency may herald a shift in people's AVT habits and taste; an issue which has been reported and discussed by Chaume (2013b). This can be an interesting direction for future research with larger samples.

The findings of this article also seem to show that although the participants reported that they did pay attention to the translation, voice-acting and synchronization were deemed more important than the verbal translation per se. It can be assumed that, due to the multimodal nature of audiovisual programs, the voice is more likely to capture the attention of the viewers because the viewers' satisfaction is triggered by non-translation issues. Sound, according to Butler (2002: 202), “invokes viewers' attention, cueing them to significant visual attention or a major narrative twist”.

The analysis also showed that performance of the dubbing actors and dubbing directors was considered more important than that of the translators. Looking at the topic more specifically, all participants mentioned that they know the dubbing translators, but only less than three-fourths of the participants were able to mention the name of a translator. Moreover, it was revealed that only the names of a few translators were mentioned — which is easily understood as on the Iranian TV channels, the dubbing translators are not credited, and only a few privately-owned dubbing companies add the name of the translator on their websites or in their products. The dubbing translators could be made more visible and the awareness about their duties among the general

public could be raised if the industry credited them, and the critics directed some attention in their direction.

The issues of dubbing quality and translation quality were also among the areas examined in this project. Generally speaking, dubbing quality and translation quality were rated satisfactory although less than half of the participants also evaluated them “fairly low” to “low”. In this regard, several of participants, in the qualitative segments of the study, did complain about the low quality of dubbing. The other findings shed light on what the participants expect from a quality Persian dubbing. In sum, these results demonstrate that expectations are guided by the performance of voice-acting, translation, dubbing directing and dubbing studios. What is striking is that voice-acting dominated the comments the participants made about dubbing expectations. This is consistent with the rest of the results obtained from this survey.

Due to practical reasons, this research was partly limited in different ways, which call for further research. The study was limited to a small, select sample of dubbing viewers. Hence, the findings should not be considered representative, as a means to gain in-depth knowledge of expectations in a selected group of viewers. The results can generate hypotheses for future studies with larger samples. Additionally, only descriptive statistical analyses were used. Future studies could consider larger samples and inferential statistics for improved generalizability of the results. Since this investigation only examined the attitudes of adult viewers, another intriguing possibility for further research could involve exploring the opinions of children, who are purportedly the important consumers of dubbed products. Also, the younger generation may have a better command of English than the older generations and may, therefore, like to listen to original dialogues in English films and programs by using subtitling; therefore, this may be an interesting line of investigation for future studies. Subsequent research on reception is also recommended to consider dubbing as a whole and to take into account the multimodal aspects of dubbing in terms of reception. This has attracted the attention of several researchers who have recently begun exploring and investigating non-translational aspects of dubbing. As one of the most popular examples, mentions could be made of Bosseaux's (2015) fascinating monograph on characterization in dubbing.

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Appendix A: The English version of the dubbing reception questionnaire

A: Demographic questions

Age: Gender: Do you work in the dubbing industry?

B: Main questions

1. Why do you prefer watching dubbing?

- The enjoyment of watching a dubbed program
- Ease of watching dubbing
- Lack of access to the original programs
- Low quality of Persian subtitles
- The non-existence of professional subtitling in Iran
- The availability of dubbing
- Or

2. To what extent do you notice the phrasing of the dialogues in a dubbed program?

Extremely high High Average Little No attention

3. Why do you notice the phrasing of the dialogues in a dubbed program?

- Mistrusting translation
- The importance of translation in dubbing
- Knowing foreign languages and comparing the translation with the original
- Or

4. To what extent do you know dubbing translators?

Extremely high High Average Little Not at All

5. Please write the name of a dubbing translator if you could remember any.

6. Please rate the current quality of dubbing translation.

Excellent Quality Good Quality Fair Quality Poor Quality No Opinion

7. Please rate the current quality of dubbing.

Excellent Quality Good Quality Fair Quality Poor Quality No Opinion

8. When choosing or watching a dubbing, to whom do you pay attention most?

Translator Dubbing Director Dubbing Actors

9. When choosing or watching a dubbing, to which do you pay attention most?

Translation Synchronization Voice-acting

10. Do you prefer Iran produces professional subtitling in addition to dubbing?

Yes No No Opinion

11. Do you prefer Iran stops producing dubbing and starts producing professional subtitling instead?

Yes No No Opinion

12. Please justify your answers for the two previous questions?

13. What characteristics do you think a dubbed program should have for you to enjoy it?

Appendix B: The map of the thematic analysis of the data

Themes	Codes	Extracts from the data
Voice-acting	Characterization	P26: I think the professional and experienced dubbing actors should be employed. I've watched a large number of dubbings in which the dubbing actors did not act well. Their voice did not well fit the character in the film. To me, dubbing directors should work more on choosing the right dubbing actor for the role.
	Voice quality	P33: The voice of the dubbing actor should perfectly match the actor's voice. What is more important is how the dubbing actor conveys the emotions of the original actor. This should not be overemphasized or exaggerated since this makes the viewer occupy him/herself praising the voice of the dubbing actor rather than being transported into the film. P6: I think the dubbing actors should watch the whole film they want to dub or at least the scenes they will dub so as to understand and grasp the character, the way the character speaks, his voice features, ups and downs in his speaking, etc.
Translation	Accuracy and faithfulness	P33: A good dubbing requires accurate and faithful translation and the coherence among the dialogues is of necessity. So I believe, there should be more collaboration between the translator and the dubbing director in order to offer a better translation. P12: Censoring dialogues, changing boyfriend and girlfriend to fiancées is really a sort of disrespect to the audience. I would like to watch a film with no censorship and I don't want to feel stupid.
	Naturalness and good structures	P1: A perfect translation is an important part of a good dubbing. The translation should be natural with good structures and sentences. Some translations, I think, are not enjoyable as in the past we had very great translations for dubbing. P43: I work as a dubbing director, sometimes we are delivered translations that are not good and do not fit the way the character speaks or not suitable for the spoken languages. This is the mistake of the translators but I wonder why other dubbing directors do not spend any energy on the translations to edit them and make them more natural.
	Familiarity of the translators with original and Persian languages as well as the culture	P19: Let's look at the past, some 20 years ago [...] we had Amir Houshang Zand and Hossein Shayegan and some others that I don't remember their names. They all lived in English countries and were quite familiar with the English language and culture. I don't think so if we have great translators like them at the moment. P7: For me, a good dubbing is comprised of several factors such as professional translators who are well-familiar with the language spoken by the character and Persian. Although the dubbing director has an important role in revising the translation and synchronizing it, it is the translator who says the last word because it is him who is well-familiar with the languages. I wish our dubbing director had a perfect knowledge of the original language.

Dubbing directing	Perfect synchronization	P36: A dubbing is good if its synchronization is good. The dubbing director should work hard on the translation draft to offer a very good synchronized version for the actors.
	Voice selection	<p>P29: You know why I say our dubbing quality has decreased in recent years is that everybody has become a dubbing director! In the past, this task was only given to the very professional people who really cared about the quality and the voices they tended to choose. Now, the dubbing directors only choose those dubbing actors who are their friends or relatives. So how can I watch such a dubbing?</p> <p>P10: As you know we don't have many professional dubbing actors in Iran but this should not make the dubbing director to overuse one dubbing actor or to use him/her for several roles in a film. This is not good and should be avoided.</p>
	Perfect dialogues	<p>P42: The dialogues produced for the dubbing should be as perfect as possible. This is the translator's duty to produce accurate and natural translation but this the dubbing director's creativity that gives life to them so we don't feel them.</p> <p>P17: The dialogues should be good and the dubbing director should attempt not to deviate much from the original at the expense of synchronization</p>
Dubbing studios	Dubbing blockbuster products	P5: The dubbing companies and TV channels should dub blockbuster films and TV series. There are many interesting American TV series or films which have not been dubbed into Persian and I am forced to watch them with subtitles.
	Visual censorship and scene omission	<p>P39: No censorship! What do they think when they censor the images like covering the women's clothing or removing a whole scene?</p> <p>P30: I don't like censorship in dubbing and this has been the cancer of Persian dubbing; we're grown up people not children!</p>
	Low payment	P41: Although the low quality of Persian dubbing is due to the inexperienced and unskillful agents involved in the process, the other side of coin is the low salaries they receive. If they not are paid well, their work and duty would be negatively affected by this low payment.