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## CRITICIZING THE PERSIAN TRANSLATION OF NABOKOV'S LAUGHTER IN THE DARK BASED ON TOURY'S TARGET-ORIENTED APPROACH TO TRANCISM

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### ABSTRACT

The present study aims to make an objective judgment on the Persian translation of Nabokov's (1989) *Laughter in the Dark* according to Toury's (2012) target-oriented approach to trancism by discovering the extent of the involvement of three types of norms, namely initial norms, preliminary norms, and operational norms, in the translation. To do so, a comparison was made between the original text and its translation at word, phrase, and sentence levels. Graedler's (2000) translation strategies, including making up a new word, explaining the meaning of the SL expression in lieu of translating it, preserving the SL term intact, replacing it using any term in the TL that has the same "relevance" as the SL term, were employed to investigate types of the translation strategies Nikfarjam (2012) employed as the micro level and his overall strategy at the macro level. This led to a full investigation of the influence of initial norms on the translation type, adequate or acceptable. As the results indicated, the tree norms were involved in the translation to a great degree and Nikfarjam had a strong interest in the TT-oriented strategies rather than the ST-oriented ones. This caused him to produce an acceptable translation. In conclusion, Toury's target-oriented approach is appropriate for trancism because it takes into consideration a series of factors, such as linguistic and socio-cultural factors, in the translation evaluation.

**Keywords:** Trancism; initial norms; preliminary norms; operational norms.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Criticism of a translation is a judgment made on the translated text to approve or disapprove of the translator's performance. Abdi (2021a) implies that *trancism*<sup>1</sup> is a fair judgment that enables the translator "to improve the translation through the constructive comments provided by the critic" (p. 261). As Taqiyeh (2005) states, it is also a comprehensive look at the translation from different dimensions. For Newmark (1988), trancism is important because it links up translation theory and its practice. In this context, Dalaslan (2015) argues that criticism is an observation and interpretation made by someone else on a work.

To avoid subjectivism, trancism, as Abdi (2021b) argues, should be conducted objectively and systematically because "objective translation criticism is *verifiable*" (Reiss, 2000, p. 4). Such a judgment keeps criticism away from error analysis and makes a distinction between them. That is to say, trancism gives special attention to the quality of the translation while error analysis deals with the goodness or the badness of the translation. This objective judgment, as Broeck (1985) states, requires a systemic description, starting from a comparison between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT). He further noted that to achieve

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<sup>1</sup>Trancism is the term coined by the author in 2021 for Translation Criticism.

objectivism, the critic needs to have a range of competences, namely literary, interlinguistic, and intercultural competences.

Toury (2012) considers the last competence necessary for translators because translations are treated as cultural facts that host them. He also believes that a good translation is one that is initiated by the target culture and made according to a systemic approach equipped with methodology and research techniques. Toury takes into account these two factors as a starting point for his target-oriented approach to translation and transcism. In the light of Toury's approach, the present study aimed at making a systemic judgment on the Persian translation of Nabokov's (1989) *Laughter in the Dark* to determine the extent of the involvement of Toury's norms, including *initial norms*, *preliminary norms*, and *operational norms*, in the translation. To end this, the following questions are answered:

1. According to Toury's initial norms, was the translator able to produce an acceptable translation?
  - a) What translation strategies did the translator apply for translating cultural items from English into Persian at the micro level?
  - b) What was the overall strategy of the translator at the macro level?
2. According to Toury's preliminary norms, what was the policy and directness of the translation?
3. Did Toury's operational norms considerably influence on the translation process?
4. Was Toury's target-oriented approach applicable to transcism?

## 2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

### 2.1 Toury's Target-Oriented Approach

Toury (2012) developed his approach on the basis of two concepts, including cultural and systemic concepts. In other words, he based his approach on the descriptive translation studies (DTS) branch, with more focus on the product-oriented sub-branch. That is why his approach is target-oriented. He explains that the essential factor that determines the function and position of a text is the culture that would host it. Toury further states that a text should be presented in the host culture in a way that the people in the culture, who have come to communicate with its translation, are not aware that they are reading a translation. As he discusses, the reason is to make clear the culture-internal distinctions as a base for the *study* of translation, to prevent imposing any differences that may be alien to that culture. That is why translators act first of all for the benefit of the culture into which they translate according to Toury.

The systemic position that Toury (2012) considers in his approach points to two principles, *acceptability* and *adequacy*. It is instead to say, if a text is produced in a particular culture/language for a certain position in the host culture, it is considered an acceptable translation. By contrast, if a translated text represents the culture that already exists in another language and has its position within it, it is regarded as an adequate translation. Toury argues that the acceptability or the adequacy of the translation is not absolute, rather a mixture of both is possible. This is because both cultures are presented in translation, whether we like it or not. This may account for more or less similarities between cultures as he describes.

In his approach, Toury (2012) proposes three types of norms, including *initial norms*, *preliminary norms*, and *operational norms*, that play a central role in socio-cultural behavior, affecting the translation process. Initial norms define the translator's choices made for

translating a text. Preliminary norms determine the translation policy and direction of the translation. Translation policy alludes to factors governing the selection of text types to be translated in a particular language/culture, whereas directness of the translation investigates whether there is an intermediate language between the original text and translation (e.g., Germany to Persian via English). The last norms refer to decision-making that affects the translation process.

Toury (2012) divides operational norms into *matricial norms* and *textual-linguistic norms*. The former norms determine decisions on the macro-structure of a text (e.g. dividing a text into chapters or paragraphs). In contrast, the latter norms deal with the decisions on the micro-structure of a text (e.g. selecting the TT stylistic features and word choices). Toury's norms are beneficial to the critic to determine the translator's choices and decisions made for the translation process and also helpful to find out the reasons behind selecting a text. For him, norms are values or ideas specific to a culture/language. Toury believes that translation norms are unstable and can be changed at any time, affecting translation at every stage.

## 2.2 Graedler's Translation Strategies

Graedler (2000) proposes four translation strategies to cope with cultural terms. This includes as follows:

1. Making up a new word  
No example was found for this strategy.
2. Explaining the meaning of the SL expression in lieu of translating it  
Example:  
"whose red palm was a perfect cornucopia of blows." (p. 18)  
"کف سرخ دستهایش نشان از فراوانی ضرباتی داشت که بر دیگران فرود آورده بود." (ص. ۲۰)  
"he greeted her incontinently with:" (p. 32)  
"آلبیموس پیش از هر حرفی بی آنکه بتواند جلوی خود را بگیرد گفت:" (ص. ۴۵)
3. Preserving the SL term intact  
Example:  
"he was a well-groomed gentleman smelling of talcum powder..." (p. 40)  
"او جنتلمنی خوش لباس و آراسته بود که بوی خوب تالک می داد." (ص. ۵۹)  
"Is this a catalogue?" asked Rex (p. 90)  
رکس پرسید: "کاتالوگ است؟" (ص. ۱۴۲)
4. Replacing it using any term in the TL that has the same "relevance" as the SL term  
Example:  
"a spasm of joy." (p. 28)  
"در پوست خود نمیگنجد." (ص. ۴۰)  
"His sister's married happiness" (p. 41)  
"سعادت خواهرش در زندگی زناشویی" (ص. ۶۱)

## 2.3 Recent Studies in the Field

Notwithstanding the importance of subject matter under investigation, this field of study has rarely been taken into consideration. Most efforts in trancism made by foreign researchers than domestic ones. That is to say, Iranian researchers have shown a slight interest in this fascinating research area of Translation Studies (TS) and given their attention to other sub-areas of TS,

such as text analysis and translation. From existing studies undertaken transcism, a significant majority have concentrated on Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) based on House's (1997) model of TQA. Few studies have examined transcism through other models of criticism. This makes the present study significant because it judges the quality of the translation via a different model that has been infrequently employed. In the following, some recent studies in the field are provided:

Hedayati and Yazdani (2020) evaluate the quality of English translations of Imam Khamenei's letters whose audiences were the youth in the West according to House's revised (1997) model of transcism. Based on the results of their study, there were dimensional mismatches between the original and the translated versions in the areas of field, tenor, and mode. In the same area of study, Alavi and Noroozi (2020) assessed The Persian translation of Gaiman's *Graveyard*. The results indicated that the Persian translation did not pursue the ST in several cases and was highly classified into a covert translation where a cultural filter has been applied. Imanizadeh and Razavi (2019) conduct a three-phase study to judge the quality of the Persian translations of 32 English tourism textbooks based on three models, namely Albir (1995) and Waddington (2001). They conclude that the quality of the translated textbooks is unacceptable and that they could not fulfill the intended purpose.

Asgari (2021) applied Waddington's model of TQA to the students' exam papers, already assessed and scored by their instructors. The results of the two sets of scores demonstrated no correlation between the scores obtained through applying Waddington's model and the scores assigned to the papers by the instructors. This was due to the objectivism of the assessment accomplished by instructors and the shortcomings of Waddington's model that are not much objective. From international researchers, Rosniala et al., (2021) analyzes the translation of ecological terms made by the translator. Based on the results, the translator employed a series of Newark's translation procedures, for instance literal and paraphrases, bringing the translations closer to the target language.

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1 Corpus

The electronic version of the book *Laughter in the Dark* that was written by Nabokov (1989) in English and published by Vintage International in 163 pages, alongside its Persian translation made by Nikfarjam (2012) that Morvarid Publication published in 247 pages was chosen in the present study as the sample of analysis. The reason for choosing this novel was an interest the researcher has in Nabokov's works due to his fame and writing style that made him one of the master prose stylists of the century in both Russian and English. *Laughter in the Dark* is a strange novel for summarizing the story in the first few lines. In the readers' imagination, this may seem that the book is not story-oriented. In the style of all modern and post-modern books. But this notion is wrong. The story is very cinematic and story-oriented with a simple and humorous style as well as with solid characterizations, making the novel attractive to the readers. In addition, the book encompasses many types of cultural items that pose challenges to the translator.

#### 3.2 Design of the Study

The present study is descriptive because the analysis model was developed on the basis of and fallen into the descriptive branch of TS. Descript research, as McCombes (2019) describes, enables the researcher to give a systemic description of the population or phenomenon to get the answers to *what, where, when* and *how* questions. The current study also applied qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyze non-numerical (e.g. text) and numerical data.

### 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

For data collection, the English version of the book and its Persian translation were thoroughly investigated to make a systemic judgment according to Toury's (2012) model of trancism to determine the type of translation Nikfarjam (2012) produced from English into Persian. To end this, a comparison was made between the SL items and their Persian translations at word, phrase, and sentence levels. To discover translation strategies employed by Nikfarjam at the micro level and his overall strategy at the macro level, Graedler's (2000) translation strategies, including *making up a new word*, *explaining the meaning of the SL expression in lieu of translating it*, *preserving the SL term intact*, *replacing it using any term in the TL that has the same "relevance" as the SL term*, were applied. This led to investigate the influence of initial norms on the translation type, adequate or acceptable.

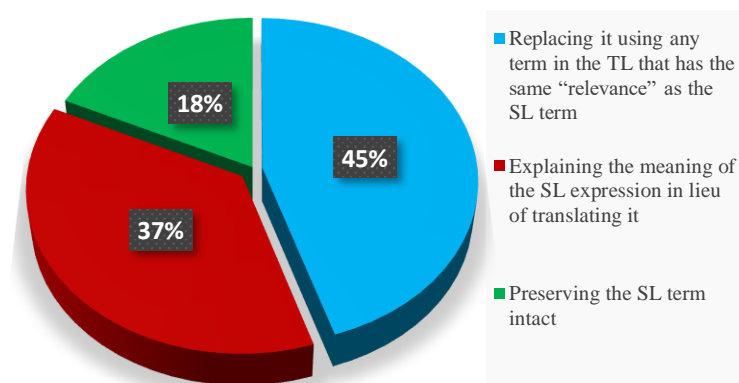
An analysis was also done on matricial and textual-linguistic norms to find out the difference in the macro-structure of the text and punctuation as well as in the word choice, use of italics etc. It also helped to find out the translation policy and directness of the translation, falling into preliminary norms. Moreover, the frequencies and percentages of translation strategies Nikfarjam applied to translate the SL items from English into Persian were calculated and illustrated through tables. In addition, chi-square ( $X^2$ ) test was run to find out the relationship between the types of translation strategies and the number of them. It should be mentioned that due to a large number of components that are affected by both matricial norms and textual-linguistic norms and to the impossibility of considering all components in the present study, some of them were taken into analysis in the present study.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on Table 1, the total number of translation strategies employed by Nikfarjam (2012) at the micro level was 343. In addition, he employed *replacing it using any term in the TL that has the same "relevance" as the SL term* as the most ( $n = 156$ ) and *preserving the SL term intact* as the least ( $n = 61$ ) used strategies. *Making up a new word* strategy was not applied by him when translating Nabokov's (1989) *Laughter in the Dark* from English into Persian.

**Table 1 Frequency and Percentage of Translation Strategies Used by Nikfarjam at Micro Level**

Strategies	<i>f</i>	%
Replacing it using any term in the TL that has the same "relevance" as the SL term	156	45.0
Explaining the meaning of the SL expression in lieu of translating it	126	37.0
Preserving the SL term intact	61	18.0
Making up a new word	0	0.0
Total	343	100.0



**Figure1:** Percentage of Translation Strategies Used by Nikfarjam at Micro Level

As Table 2 indicates, the total number of the TL-oriented strategies Nikfarjam (2012) employed was 282. This was higher than the total number of the SL-oriented strategies ( $N = 61$ ) he applied at the micro level ( $282 > 61$ ).

**Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of the SL- and TL-Oriented Strategies Used by Nikfarjam at Micro Level**

SL-Oriented Strategies	<i>f</i>	%	TL-Oriented Strategies	<i>f</i>	%
Preserving the SL term intact	61	100.0	Replacing it using any term in the TL that has the same "relevance" as the SL term	156	55.0
Making up a new word	0	0.0	Explaining the meaning of the SL expression in lieu of translating it	126	45.0
Sum	61	100.0	Sum	282	100.0

#### 4.2. Chi-Square Test ( $X^2$ )

To see whether the difference between the types of translation strategies and the number of them used by Nikfarjam (2012) is significant, Chi-square test is run. Table 4 reveals the amount of  $p$  value that is .579, which is higher than .05 ( $p > .05$ ). Thus, there is not a significant difference between the types of translation strategies and the number of them applied by Nikfarjam.

**Table 3. Summary of the Chi-Square Test for the Type of Translation Strategies and the Total Number of Them Used by Nikfarjam**

Translation Strategies	<i>N</i>	$X^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>n</i>				
3	343	1.09	2	.579

### 4.3 Descriptive Analysis of the Translation

#### 4.3.1 Initial Norms

Initial norms determine the translation strategies at the micro level, leading to define the overall strategy of the translation at the macro level and the adequacy and acceptability of the translation. To achieve this, the translation strategies proposed by Graedler's (2000) was applied at the analytical level to see the types of translation strategies Nikfarjam (2012) employed to deal with the ST item from English into Persian. As the results indicate, Nikfarjam used three out of four Graedler's strategies, namely *replacing it using any term in the TL that has the same "relevance" as the SL term*, *explaining the meaning of the SL expression in lieu of translating it*, and *preserving the SL term intact*, to cope with the SL items.

Besides, the most/least used translation strategies by him were *replacing it using any term in the TL that has the same "relevance" as the SL term* and *explaining the meaning of the SL expression in lieu of translating it* respectively. According to the findings, Nikfarjam had a preference for the TT-oriented strategies over the ST-oriented ones, indicating his orientation towards the TT culture/language. Thus, the translation he produced was subject to the target culture norms and mostly considered an acceptable one. This is because no translation can "be 100% acceptable or 100% adequate" and vice versa as Toury (2012, p. 70) states. It is rather to say, the target readers will not realize that they are reading a translation.

#### 4.3.2 Preliminary Norms

Preliminary norms, as Toury (2012) implies, take into account two main interconnected norms, relating to the policy and directness of the translation. Translation policy deals with the reason(s) for selecting a text to be translated into a specific culture/language. As Toury did not make it clear how to determine the cause for the selection of a text, there may be various reason(s) for choosing Nabokov (1989) *Laughter in the Dark*, one of which can be the popularity of the novel through the world. Although other Nabokov's works, namely *Lolita*, were more interesting and worth publishing due to some limitations, such as filtering policy, Iranian publishers are restricted to publish any book they want. This causes publishers/translators to show a slight interest in romantic stories. The fame of the author and widespread support of the novel by readers raise the economic motivation for its translation comes into being. The publisher has accepted the translation of the novel *Laughter in the Dark* for publication in order to make money from it. Making and investing in other versions of its translation, for example eBook and audiobook versions, approves its economic status in domestic market.

Directness of the translation refers to the existence of an intermediate language between the SL and the TL. That is to find out if the translation was made from a language other than the original. The information available is that Nabokov (1989) first wrote the novel *Laughter*

*in the Dark* in Russian. It is unclear whether the novel was translated from Russian into Persian or from English into Persian. Moreover, there is no complete information about the translator and the language pairs he is an expert at. At a guess, it seems that the novel *Laughter in the Dark* was translated from English into Persian.

#### 4.3.3 Operational Norms

Compared with initial norms that define the translation strategies, operational norms, as Toury (2012) argues, determine the decisions the translator makes during the translation process. He clarifies that these norms may have a role in the acceptability or the adequacy of the translation because they constitute a mode according to what type of translation comes into being. Operational norms fall into two groups: matricial norms and textual-linguistic norms. The former norms, as Toury mentions, are the TL materials chosen as substitutions for the SL materials, indicating “the degree of *fullness* of translation” (p. 82), the location such materials have in the text, or how linguistic materials are in fact “*distributed* throughout it,” and also “the text’s segmentation into, stanzas, passages and suchlike” (p. 83). The particular degree of omissions, additions, and manipulation of segments, as Toury describes, are also determined.

As the results of descriptive analysis show, Nikfarjam (2012) tended to employ addition strategy rather than omission one. Such a strategy is considered a TT-oriented one and used to make the meaning of the SL item more understandable to the target readers. For example, Nikfarjam translated the single ST item *a tempestuous* into جنجالی و طوفانی via two TT items, one of which is considered as an additional explanation to make the SL item more apparent to the audience. In another example, Nikfarjam used a brief description of an overcoat belonging to Albinus’s brother-in-law, one of the main characters in the story. Thus, the SL statement *his brother-in-law’s vast overcoat which was hanging on its coat-hanger* was translated into پالتوی بزرگ برادر زنش که مثل همیشه آرام و شوق و رقی روی چوب رختی آویزان بود.

In the case of text segmentation, Nikfarjam mostly followed the structure of the original text. He translated the text chapter by chapter according to the division exhibited in the ST. that is to say, Nabokov (1989) divides his novel into 39 chapters that Nikfarjam observed the same number in the translated version. As to paragraphs, most segmentations of the ST were not changed and paragraphs were translated into the TT with the same segmentation. The only segmentations that contained information about the author, namely sections relating to the author’s profile, autobiography/literature, and the introduction of his works, and about the book, such as the table of contents and the publication history of the book, were omitted from the translated version. In terms of punctuation, Nikfarjam employed a middle ground strategy. In other words, in some cases he preferred to preserve the punctuation of the ST; whereas in some cases not.

Textual-linguistic norms, as Toury (2012) argues, address the linguistic materials the translator chooses to form the TT, or to replace with the ST materials, such as italicizing, word choices, and so on. Nikfarjam (2012) mostly applied italicizing strategy whenever he considered it a need from his point of view, although in some cases he attempted to indicate his faithfulness to the style of Nabokov (1989). For example, the SL sentence *the sun is shining* is translated into خورشید دارد میرخشد in which the TT word دارد was italicized. Here, Nikfarjam did not follow the author’s style when writing the TT item in italics. The translator employed this strategy may be due to an attempt he made to draw the readers’ attention to the importance of the message. In other words, Nikfarjam aimed to highlight the meaning of the SL item to the target readers by italicizing the ST item. Although his performance in this regard was admirable, he applied such a strategy inappropriately to few cases. For instance, the SL



sentence *I am a coward* was rendered into *واقعا ترسو هستم*. Adding the TL item *واقعا* was enough to stress the Albinus's fear. There was no need to italicize this SL item.

As it is discussed before, Nikfarjam (2012) indicated his faithfulness to the target culture/language via the employment of the TT-oriented strategies that was mainly successful in doing so. The problematic issue was that some of these TT materials might not be familiar to the target audiences due to the infrequent use of them by people. For example, Nikfarjam rendered the SL statement *full of slick young actors* into *بیر است از هنرپیشه های جوان و چاچول باز*. The TL item *چاچول باز* was not chosen skillfully due to the unfamiliarity of such an item to most readers. Thus, a familiar equivalent for the SL item *slick* could be *دغلباز* or *فربیکار*. The translator should take the importance of choosing an appropriate equivalent seriously because it leads to a product, as Toury implies, aimed to "serve communication in the TL" (p. 242).

Based on morphological analysis, Nikfarjam (2012) pursued the structure of the ST and translated *doubling* formats the same as that they were used in the ST. Nabokov (1989) applied *doubling* for more emphasis on what he was telling. For example, Albinus is trying to calm Margot down, one main character in the story, by comforting her as he asks her softly *What is it you want? What is it you want, Margot?* Here, Nabokov is showing the situation via *doubling*. Nikfarjam translate this SL item into *تو چی میخواهی؟ چی می خواهی، مارگو؟* to create the same impression on the target readers as that made on the source audiences. Nikfarjam indicated a particular interest in such a strategy/format as he applied reduplication to the translations of most SL items. For instance, the SL items *standing*, *chattering*, *sauntered* were rendered into *سیخ سیخ*, *قرچ قرچ*, *سلانه سلانه* respectively.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Trancism is a complicated task that requires vast knowledge about the existing models and a range of skills, for instance evaluation and interpretation skills, that the critic should acquire. In addition, criticism should be made in accordance with a systemic model, leading to an objective judgment rather than a subjective one. Thus, the present study aims to make a systemic judgment on the Persian translation of Nabokov's (1989) *Laughter in the Dark* based on Toury's systemic model of trancism. Along with preliminary norms, except directness of the translation, operational norms were involved in the translation of SL items and statements from English into Persian as the results revealed. Manipulating the original book via addition strategy and omission technique in a few cases, and making wise decisions on word choices appropriate to the target culture/language approve the engagement of optional norms in the translation to a large extent. According to the results, the type of translation Nikfarjam produced was affected by initial norms because such norms define the translation strategies at the micro, leading to the translator's overall strategy at the macro level. As the results showed, Nikfarjam (2012) employed the TT-oriented strategy in preference for the ST-oriented ones, causing the target culture norms to exert a strong influence on the translation and to get control of it. Thus, the translation Nikfarjam produced was acceptable. Hence, it can be concluded that Toury's (2012) target-oriented approach is appropriate for trancism because it considers many factors to describe the translation, such as linguistic and socio-cultural factors.

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