

Translation and Subtitling: A Study on Telephone Conversation Opening and Closing, with English and Persian in Focus

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Abstract

The present study aims to focus on telephone conversation opening and closing in Persian and the problems which may emerge in translating them into English. With particular attention to the studies done on telephone conversations by Schegloff (1968; 1986), Liddicoat (2007), Taleghani Nikazem (2002), and Khadem and Eslami Rasekh (2012), the researchers intend to analyze some movies and series in Persian as the source language and compare them with their subtitled translations in English. The corpus of the study consists of the telephone conversations in Persian with their subtitled translations, which both are extracted from these movies and series. As there are some differences in the cultures of both Persian and English and some peculiarities exist in the structure of telephone conversations in both languages, there seems some noticeable findings will be achieved.

Keywords: the summons-answer sequence, pre-closing sequences, identification-recognition sequences, terminal sequences

1. Introduction

English is the language of the globalized world and it is used as a lingua Franca in international communities (Graddol, 1997). Because of so, nowadays people in every country pay a special attention to learning English as a second language. For example, these days in Iran people approximately ranging from kids around 6 to adults around 40 or 50 are learning English in language institutes. Besides learning English in institutes, they get help from subtitled movies in order to improve their skills. Most of the time they are mostly interested to see how some cultural points or special interactions are performed in English, so they choose the movies either in English or Persian and their subtitles are either Persian or English respectively. Of course there are some other alternatives too, but because of the purpose of the present study, the researchers have only mentioned the two options above.

The researchers in this study aim to focus on telephone conversations and see how the different parts of telephone conversations have been translated, so they have selected some movies and series in Persian with English as the subtitled form of them.

1.1 Why telephone Conversations?

As the cultures of English and Persian are different in some points, and some peculiarities exist in the two languages regarding telephone conversations, the researchers think translators will face lots of problems in dealing with them.

1.2 Literature Review

Different researchers have focused on telephone conversation opening and closing in different languages. For example by analyzing the telephone conversation openings in English, Schegloff (1986) claims that a telephone conversation opening in English includes four parts :1) a summon-answer sequence, 2) an identification-recognition sequence, 3) a greeting sequence, and at last 4) how are you sequences.

Liddicoat (2007) has analyzed the structure of telephone conversation openings and closings and the same as schegloff he mentions those four sequences in telephone conversation openings and focuses in detail on different parts. Regarding the closing, he argues that the closing of a telephone conversation is done collaboratively by

both participants in action. First they both prepare a closing implicative environment, and then the preclosings are mentioned such as ok and alright, and at last the terminal components.

Taleghani-Nikazm (2002) has explored the structure of telephone conversation opening in Iran and suggests that like the sequential organization of telephone conversation opening in English, Iranians have these four sequences too. That is, a summon-answer sequences, then identification-recognition sequences after that a greeting sequence and at last the how are you sequences. In addition to that, she has contrasted “ritual routines” in telephone conversation openings in Iran and Germany. She specifically has focused on the ritual “how are you” in both cultures. She describes that Iranians after inquiring about one another’s well-being, ask about the well-being of their respective families.

In an investigation of telephone conversation closing in Iran, Khadem and Eslami Rasekh (2012) have found that Iranian, like the American English, use a particular class of speech tokens in order to end their telephone conversations. First, they make some preparations which Liddicoat (2007) refers to as closing implicative environments, Then preclosing sequences which they believe are mostly saying hello to somebody for somebody that in Persian is known to “Salam Resoundan”, and finally are the terminal sequences.

1.3 The Purpose

As it was seen above, studies on telephone conversation openings and closings have been done to some degree. With the existence of some special differences in the occurrence of some expressions like the preclosing sequence that is “salam resoundan” (saying hello to somebody for somebody) in Persian, the researchers plan to focus on some original films in Persian with English language as their subtitles. They are going to concentrate on Alo?(Hello?) as the answer to the ringing of the phone, identification and recognition sequences, the preclosing sequences, and finally the terminal sequences. They aim to investigate whether the subtitles have been translated correctly or not, Why they have been translated in some special forms, Or if necessary, they’re going to make some recommendations. In fact as most of the terms which are used in these different sequences in telephone conversations are rooted in the cultures of the countries, there seems most of the time they will not be translated in the correct form.

2. Method

The researchers in this study have selected 4 movies (Davood and Ghomri; online murder; additional time; and the taste of unripe fruit) and 4 series (the forbidden fruit; Shokraneh; Five kilometers to heaven; the fall of an angel). They were the kinds of movies and series which were broadcast on channels IRIB 1Per, IRIB 2Per and IRIB 3. The series were in 30 episodes and were shown in Ramadan every day. The corpus of the study consists of 40 telephone conversations. Some are only openings, some just closings and in some cases the openings and the closings are both included. Because they are only the telephone calls in movies and series, in some cases the researchers have to focus only on the speech of one of the participants.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Telephone Conversation Opening

3.1.1 The Summon-answer Sequence

Liddicoat (2007) has observed that in telephone conversation openings, the first turn is the ringing of the phone. The answerer picks up the phone and says hello?. This turn by the speaker may take other forms such as self-identification by name or maybe by telephone number. After that the caller speaks. He believes that it is not always according to this rule. Maybe in some situations the answerer who picks up the phone does not say any word, so the caller speaks and says hello?, in fact, the role of the caller and the speaker changes.

Schegloff (1968) argues that if this role reversal of the caller and the receiver continues, there’s the possibility of the occurrence of different forms of talk: 1) hello with some explanations like the example Liddicoat (2007) has mentioned: “Hello, this is Harry”. This kind of self-identification can happen in different forms, depending on the relationship between the participants 2) it is possible that the caller produces only a simple unexpected hello. 3) the caller produces a hello token along with an identification of the answerer and 4) as Sacks (1992) suggests it is possible that the caller produces the reason for the call.

As it was said above, in a normal telephone conversation, the answerer’s picking up the phone is followed by “hello?”. Liddicoat (2007) believes that other forms of answering to the ringing are also possible but they are limited to specific contexts. The possible forms he suggests are “yes”, “yeah” and “hi”. But as Schegloff (1986) argues, “yeah” is used in situations that the answerer is completely sure about the identity of the caller. Liddicoat (2007) has made an example of the situations in which a telephone call has just been ended and the receiver is

waiting for the call of that person again. As he says, if the answerer uses “hi” as the response to the ringing, it means that s/he has a high degree of certainty about the caller and because of that he uses this informal form. According to Liddicoat (2007), the answerer’s response mostly in institutional contexts can be self-identification.

With the consideration of above discussion, the researchers are going to focus on the first part of opening that is “Allo?” in Persian and the translation of it in English as a subtitle. Analyzing the foresaid “Allo?”, the researchers found the following:

Iranian, when picking up the phone, mostly use the following: Alo? /bale? /bale?Alo?/Bale,befarmayeed?Alo salam/Alo {Sarajan}?

These different forms in Persian can be used regardless of the context, but the researchers believe that the best equivalent for all the expressions above is “hello?”. In some cases the word “Alo?” is accompanied by a greeting word and sometimes by tag-positioned address terms and a word of endearment “Alo Sarajan”.

Considering the subtitled translation of these expressions, the researchers found that 56.52%of the cases above are translated correctly as in (1),30.43% incorrectly as in (2),13.04% have not been translated as in (3).

(1)

A: Alo?

A: Hello?

B: Salam,toyee Ghazale?

B: Hello,Ghazaleh is that you?

B: Bayad bebinamet.

B: I have to see you.

According to the above-said, the best equivalent for “ Alo?”is “hello?” as the answerer is not aware of the identity of the caller.

(2)

A: Bale?befarmayeed?

A: yes?

B: Man Hastiye Shayegan hastam.

B: I’m Hasti Shayegan

In the above conversation, “Bale?” has been translated wrongly to “yes?” which is a kind of affirmative word. “Hello?”is the best translation for it. As it was said above, Iranian Persian speakers, when picking up the phone, sometimes use “bale,befarmayeed” together. So it does not make any problem if both are translated to “hello?”. In some situations it is possible to translate “befarmayeed” to "Go ahead" as perhaps “A” does not hear the other person and wants to get them to speak.

In the following there’s an example of the cases where the word “Alo?” is not translated.

(3)

A: alo salam man monshiye daftare aghaye Yazdanian hastam.

A: hello,I’m Mr. Yazdanian’s secretary;

As it was seen in the case (3), the word Alo? is accompanied by a greeting word, So it’s common not to translate one of them, although their functions are different. So The best equivalent for both is “hello?”.

3.1.2 Identification

As liddicoat (2007, p.220) has noted, once the word “Alo? (Hello?)” has been used as an answer to the ringing ,“the channel for communication has been opened and each party to the conversation must identify the other before the interaction can proceed.” Liddicoat (2007) has mentioned different possibilities for this identification sequence:

1) Callers may request to talk to someone other than the answerer?

A: Hello?

B: Hello? Is your mother there? /May I speak to Susan? /can I speak to Susan?

2) Callers may self-identify themselves and it can be accompanied by some other components:

A: Hello?

B: Hi mum, it's me. /It's Jay./This is Jay.

3) Callers may ask questions about the identity of the answerer:

A: Hello?

B: Hello, is this Kitty? /Is that kim is it? /Kim?

And according to Spectrum books, the answer to the above can be "yes, it is." /"No this is Carols"/"No it's Carols...."

4) Sometimes it is possible that the callers make jokes, giving intentionally inaccurate identifications and so on:

A: Hello?

B: I'm a fairy Princess.

A: You? A fairy princess?

Sometimes the answerer cannot recognize the voice of the caller and at the same time the caller does not self-identify, so the answerer asks for the identity of the caller.

A: Who's calling, please?

B: Bob Rosansky.

The researchers think that there are some other possibilities too, but for the purpose of the present paper the above-mentioned are enough.

Analyzing the cases related to identification, the following was found:

61.11% of them have been translated correctly and 38.88% incorrectly. Among the incorrect ones, 71.42% of them are related to self-identification as in (4) and 11.11% are about asking for identification as in (5).

(4)

A: Man monshiye aghaye Yazdanian hastam

A: I'm Mr Yazdanian's secretary

The example in part (4) has been translated incorrectly. In self-identifying, the Persian speakers use the expression I'm..., but according to the above-said, the common ways of self-identifying in English are "This is..." / "it's..." and in different contexts different forms of them are possible. So it should be translated to "This is Mr. Yazdanian's secretary" because this is a formal situation and so "this is..." is preferred.

(5)

A: Bale?shoma?

A: Hello?who are you?

When asking for identification, the Persian speakers use the following expressions: "Shoma?befarmayeed?". And according to different contexts, The American English use "Who's calling?"/ "who's that?"/ "who's this?".

The above example is a formal situation and "shoma?" is better to be translated to "who's calling?".

3.2 Telephone Conversation Closing

3.2.1 Preclosing

As it was said in the introduction part, American English speakers and Iranian Persian speakers do not simply close their conversations. First, they make some preparations, that is, providing closing implicative environments, then, the pre-closing sequences happen and at last there are the terminal sequences.

According to Liddicoat (2007), the preclosing sequences in American English are mostly Ok/alright/or right with falling intonation. On the other hand, Khadem and Eslami Rasekh (2012) believe that some expressions such as "besiar khoob", "ke intor" and so on can be used in preclosing parts, but they think in Iranian culture the most common forms of preclosing are saying hello to somebody for somebody, that is "Salam Resoundan" in Persian.

Regarding the above, the researchers have analyzed the data and found the following: In the analysis of the preclosing part in the movies and series, the researchers found "Bashe, Besiyar khob" and "kheili khob" (alright, ok) and "salam resoondan (saying one's hello to others)".

Bashe khedmat miresam	Ok ,I'll come
Besiyar khob eltemase doa	Alright pray for us

As it is apparent in the above table, "Bashe" and "Besiyar khob" are correctly translated to "ok" and "alright" depending on the situation.

Regarding "salam resoundan", the researchers observed the following case: "Khanoom Bachehato salam beresoun": "Say hello to your family". In this case the translation is not a wrong one as "khanoom bacheha" means the whole family, and saying hello to somebody for somebody else is a common expression in English.

Analyzing the preclosing parts, the researchers faced the expression "Sayeye mobarak kam nashe" with the subtitle "thanks you". In Persian the expression "Sayeye mobarak kam nashe" literally means: "May the shadow of your grace not leave us." or "May your shadow never be lessened." It is a kind of pray and means I hope you always be alive. They may use it because a kind of service has been done by the other party. So according to the situation, "thank you" can be a correct translation. Sometimes it could even be translated to "I wish you the best."

Another point relevant to the preclosing is the expression "Ghorbane shoma" which happens before saying goodbye and was observed in three extracts. In 2 of them it was translated to "thank you" and in one of the cases to "ok". This expression is very common in Iranian culture and is something like thanking, so thank you is preferred in translation. "Ghorbane shoma" (Love-of-you) literally means "I sacrifice myself for you" or "I lay my life down for you". This is a very eastern style of speech. It is used when saying Goodbye. For e.g. at the end of conversation one of the participants can say:

A: Amri Nadarid?

A: Have you any further business?

And the other party can answer:

B: Ghorbane shoma. Khodafez.

In this context that's better to be translated to "Thank you, no. Goodbye" or "No, thank you. Goodbye".

3.2.2 Terminal Sequences

By analyzing the terminal sequences and their subtitled translation, the researchers found "Khoda negahdaretoon", "Khodafez", "Khodafezet bashe" and the translations were mostly "goodbye" / "bye". Both of them can be correct translations, but depending on the situations either form should be used. For example in formal situations "khodafez shoma" which literally means "May God protect you" or "God be your guardian" had better be translated to "goodbye", while in informal situations "bye" is correct. In one of the cases "khodanegahdaret bashe" which literally means "God be with you" or "Godspeed" is translated to "take care, goodbye". As a translation for this expression "Take care" is enough in place of goodbye.

In terminal sequences some rare cases were observed too and they were "Lotfe aali ziyad" and "Ya Ali". Both are translated to "good bye" and "bye". "Lotfe aali ziyad" is something related to thanking and goodbye seems inappropriate, even the word "thank you" does not show the connotation of this word, but due to the differences between the two cultures and the lack of such this expression in English, thank you or goodbye would be acceptable.

"Ya Ali" literally means "Oh, Ali". The word Ali is Imam Ali and is something related to the Iranian's religious beliefs. When someone is sitting in a place and decides to go, says "Ya Ali". As it was mentioned above, even it can be used in telephone conversations, but mostly in formal situations and between the male speakers. So due to the cultural differences again no good translation can be found for it, and as a result according to the situation "goodbye" may be appropriate. But the researchers believe "Hail Ali" or "Praise Ali" can be good translations for "Ya Ali".

4. Conclusion

The researchers in this study focused on telephone conversations and special terms which are used between the interlocutors during this kind of action. In the comparison of the terms in different parts of telephone conversations with their English subtitled forms, it was seen that sometimes due to the existence of differences regarding cultures, the terms are translated wrongly. For example the expression "Lotf aali Ziyad" which is rooted in Persian and has some special connotational meaning cannot be rendered as it is. Since most of the time students of foreign languages want to get help from these movies for better understanding of the language and culture of that target language they are learning, a special attention should be paid to subtitled movies, because

the wrong translation of the culture bound elements may mislead the common viewer, let alone the students who plan to get help from these movies and possibly apply them.

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