



**Zhirafar, Ahmad (2014). *A Comprehensive History of Dubbing into Persian in Iran: 1941-1971 (Volume 1)*. Tehran: Kule Poshti Press, 714 pp.**

**Zhirafar, Ahmad (2014). *A Comprehensive History of Dubbing into Persian in Iran: 1971-2013 (Volume 2)*. Tehran: Kule Poshti Press, 742 pp.**

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Compared with other traditional translations, say literary translation, the historiography of audiovisual translation (AVT) has remained partly underexplored, and a true and rich literature on the topic, alas, is lacking. Over the past few years, however, there have been several attempts at exploring AVT history. Noted contributions embrace O'Sullivan and Cornu (2019), Ameri (2017), Qian (2009) and Ivarsson (2009), among others.

With a long-standing history of AVT for around a century, Iran can be labeled a dubbing country because practically dubbing is the most common means for rendering foreign audiovisual fictional products. The seven decades-long history of dubbing in Iran has witnessed a multiplicity of ups and downs but dubbing is still with the Iranian in a variety of platforms or formats: Television and satellite channels, DVDs and very recently streaming. Notwithstanding this, its competitor non-professional subtitling has been troublesome in recent years and has strived to steal its followers and in some ways, it succeeded. This long-established tradition has given rise to publications devoted to dubbing. In addition to articles and essays appeared in academic journals and non-academic magazines, five books about Persian dubbing, ranging from an account of its history to its technical and professional know-how, could be found in bookstores.

Of these books, Ahmad Zhirafar's volumes have been in the spotlight because it offers a detailed and multifaceted historical account of dubbing in Iran. The books are a meaningful and invaluable contribution to the scholarship of AVT historiography in Iran and would be of more interest to Iranian researchers. The first volume covers the history from 1941 up to 1971 and the second one from the 1970s up through 2013. Both volumes were published simultaneously and are available in a hardcover format and in Persian language only. In addition to a preface and a brief introduction—presented in the first volume—the entire book holds ten chapters; the first three chapters construct the core of discussion for the first volume and other chapters are offered in the second volume. Each chapter covers one decade and the last three chapters encompass a list of the distinguished dubbing actors, a list of the foremost dubbings and a short biography of dubbing actors and dubbing directors, respectively. The first seven chapters follow a similar flow of presentation and they abound with a wealth

of interviews the author conducted with the dubbing agents and informants, and an exhaustive list of film and Television series dubbed within the given decade is offered too. Additionally, each chapter ends with a large number of photos of the agents and dubbing studios, and dubbing posters. In terms of data presentation and depth, the chapters are uneven.

With the aim of raising awareness about the early modalities of AVT in Iran, Chapter 1, before being engaged with dubbing in the 1940s, opens with a detailed description of *dilmaj* and intertitles in the era of silent films in Iran in the 1900s up to 1940s. *Dilmaj*, in simple terms, was a screen translator who was hired by the cinema owners to render, interpret and explain the original intertitles or the actions happening on the screen to cater for a group of audience who were unfamiliar with the original language or were simply illiterate. Besides *dilmaj*, some cinemas also resorted to translating the original intertitles into Persian even though a *dilmaj* was still demanded to read them to the audience. When the first foreign talkie arrived Iran, it notched up little success in keeping the Iranian audience interested in such entertainment. This is partly because the talkies were overwhelmed with dialogues, say English, unknown to the Iranian at the time and partly because the cinema equipment in screening talkies was barley state-of-the-art. To overcome this obstacle and attract the audience, the idea of *dilmaj* was again suggested by some cinema owners. The chapter goes on to give the reader information about the early stages of local film production which was launched with the production of the first Iranian silent film *Abi and Rabi* in 1929, followed up by *Lor Girl* as the first Iranian feature-length talkie in 1933. From page 40, the story of Persian dubbing begins. With the help of Ismail Kushan, the first dubbing into Persian was done in Turkey in the mid-1940s, and its screening was a huge success in Iran. Given this groundbreaking dubbing, soon attempts were made to dub films into Persian in Egypt, India and France. While the competition for dubbing was well under way, Iran-No Film, an Iranian film studio, was set up to dub films inside Iran, resulting in a dubbing race with the foreign operations. What is of noteworthy in this chapter is the use of voice-over translation (p. 48) in the early 1940s in Iran. The author does not use the word voice-over but «Russian dubbing» where a single dubbing actor dubs all the original voices and the original sound can be heard beneath the translation voice. The author notes that a set of Russian films and cartoons were imported into Iran with Persian dubbing, and they all were revoiced in Russia. The rest of the chapter discusses Persian dubbings done in Egypt, India and France and traces the establishment and evolution of dubbing studios.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the events pertaining to dubbing in the 1950s. The unprecedented growth of Persian dubbing opened the door to further dubbing productions outside the Iranian borders. As a case in point here is Alex Aghababian, an Armenian Iranian, who dubbed Italian films into Persian in Rome with the help of Iranian students and employees of the Iranian embassy as dubbing actors. What is interesting about the first Persian dubbing in Italy is the over-domestication of the dialogues with Persian names, proverbs and slang. The considerable success of the first Persian dub-

tings produced in Italy inspired many to pursue dubbing there and many companies were set up to get in on the action. On the reception of dubbings in Italy in comparison with those inside Iran, newspaper critics gave credit to Italian dubbing because of perfect translation of dialogues and excellent voice-acting. By the end of the 1950s, the number of dubbings made in Italy significantly decreased and most films were being dubbed inside Iran. Several reasons, as the chapter enumerates, could be associated with this decline, among others, the enhancement of dubbing quality inside Iran, equipping the studios with advanced revoicing systems, better remuneration for the dubbing agents and the governmental restrictions. As with the state of translation in this era, it is argued that most translations were from English, Italian, French, Spanish, etc, and the translators were Iranian with the exception of an Indian who was responsible for translating Indian programs. The chapter ends with a description of other events in this decade.

At its core, Chapter 3 explores dubbing in the 1960s. During this decade, the number of dubbing studios mushroomed and the competition to offer high-quality dubbing was intensified. Dubbing in this decade is featured with a new technique in which extra Persian colloquial expressions, slang or humorous elements were added to the translations while they were absent in the original. These expressions were inserted to the dialogues mainly by the dubbing actors when the original actors spoke off-screen. The early years of this decade witnessed a historic step towards establishing the first union or syndicate of dubbing actors. As the chapter reports, 240 dubbing actors (70 members were female) and 25 dubbing studios were the members of the union in 1966. The union's by-law approved by the board of directors encompassed 18 articles and one note. They all were largely concerned with dubbing directing and voice-acting duties, without any mention of translating and translators. In this chapter, the author also offers some information about dubbing of a few films such as *The Sound of Music* (1965) and *My Fair Lady* (1964) which their songs were translated as singable and were performed by the dubbing actors. Additionally, several pages were devoted to the voice-acting of well-known dubbing actors. For example, how Humphrey Bogart was revoiced by Hossein Erfani, the Iranian dubbing actor. The rest of the chapter presents valuable information about the 1968 dubbing strike, dubbing for the Television and some general issues including quality.

The other chapters being reviewed here are included in the second volume. In Chapter 4, Ahmad Zhirafar reviews the dubbing events occurred in the 1970s, and this decade is of significance as the Iranian Revolution happened. The first paragraph of the chapter was devoted to the translators' conditions. Due to the lack of any union for the translators, there were no specified criteria for employing them and their salary was low. Like the Italian dubbing and dubbing in the 1960s, the dialogues were still being manipulated to include more humor in the plot. A striking feature of this decade is that audience preferred a certain film star being dubbed by a particular dubbing actor and any change could trigger the rejection of the dubbed version by the viewers. Alain Delon, as the author discusses, was usually being revoiced by Khosro Khosros-

hahi. This decade is also marked by the rapid emergence of Karate and erotic films. In addition to this issue, the low salary of the dubbing agents and prioritizing speed over quality contributed to making low-quality dubbings. During this decade the dubbing actors went on strike and demanded an increase in their payment. Right after the Iranian Revolution in 1978, the volume and diversity of imported films dropped, and a shift towards political and quasi-political films was noticeable. The revolution brought about many changes in any aspect of the country and the dubbing and cinema industry went through a period of instability. The imported films were being strictly controlled and those deemed non-compliant with the established ideology were banned from dubbing. Licensed films underwent many cuts and changes including distortion in and rewriting of the plot of the films and adding revolutionary songs to dubbed versions, as Ahmad Zhirafar points out.

In Chapter 5, dubbing during the 1980s is examined. This decade is characterized by a series of events: a marked decrease in the number of imported foreign films especially western products, the prevalence of censorship, an enormous increase in the volume of films imported from Eastern Europe and Eastern Asia, the migration of dubbing actors and directors, the bankruptcy of some dubbing companies, the exodus of film distributors working in Iran, among others. The emergence of a larger number of Japanese and Chinese films in the dubbing industry negatively contributed to its development. As to the translation of these Asian films, Ahmad Zhirafar notes, they were translated by means of an English script which came with the films and the script was reportedly partial and erroneous. In 1984, intensive courses for training dubbing actors were offered under the supervision of Iran Broadcasting University and in collaboration with the experienced dubbing actors.

Chapters 6 and 7 provide a concise description and review of dubbing in the 1990s and 2000s. Unlike the 1980s, the number of films imported for dubbings increased, and the dubbing actors working for Television were classified into six categories in terms of their skills and experiences. The sixth group was paid most and the first group least. The dubbing quality and payment were still the main problems, and dubbing actors were forced to double their daily work to be able to make a living. A new phenomenon called live dubbing came into existence in the early years of this decade. As Chapter 6 demonstrates, this type of dubbing is mainly used in film festivals especially children's programs and in that the dubbing actors act out their role on a stage before the audience while the original program is being projected to a big screen. The overuse of certain dubbing actors, less accuracy and more mistakes in translations, the paucity of blockbuster films and the rush for dubbing films led to the rise of low-quality dubbings in the 1990s. The rest of the sixth chapter offers information about training and employing new dubbing actors for the industry. Chapter 7 is presented in few pages and the significant issues in the 2000s are the establishment of 21 Century Visual and Media Company—a very professional privately-owned dubbing company—the emergence of underground dubbing as well as the rise of dubbing on satellite channels.

In Chapter 8, a list of 100 dubbed films is offered and each dubbing includes such information as the top dubbing actor, the name of the dubbing director, dubbing actors, translator, sound engineer, dubbing studio as well as brief information about the film and its dubbing. Chapter 9 lists 100 successful dubbings with the same information mentioned above. Last but not least a biography of dubbing actors and directors and their personal photos are offered in Chapter 10.

Despite the volumes' well-presentation and organization of the information, the author has failed to compile a bibliography of the sources. Nevertheless, details for direct quotations are not missing as they have been given within the text. The monograph abounds with many photos and although the author in his introduction admits that some persons assisted him in gathering the photos, the source of all photos is missing. The author bolded names, titles or dates for more emphasis, however, some words were mistakenly bolded. A merit of this monograph is that each chapter contains the titles of films dubbed into Persian, which can be a very valuable source for future research. But they all were presented in Persian and no original equivalents could be found in the text. This makes it too difficult to trace the original films information as many titles have not been translated literally and back-translation does not help in finding the original titles. On a critical yet final note, this should be pointed out that each chapter holds multiple subsections which were not added to the table of content. As a result, locating specific information will be arduous.

Overall, as a splendid contribution, *A comprehensive history of dubbing into Persian in Iran* has been successful in charting the history of dubbing in Iran. It could serve as a rich source for the translation history courses and a reference book for the researchers. As a young researcher in the field of AVT, I highly recommend the volumes to film, cinema and translation studies scholars as well as those who are pondering about joining the small club of Iranian AVT researchers.

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