

MOTHERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS TABOO WORDS IN PERSIAN DUBBED VERSION OF *SPONGEBOB* SERIES

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ABSTRACT

*It is obviously accepted that translation of taboos, particularly in cartoons, regarding the fact that the item is related to children makes it more difficult than other areas of translation. Cartoon translation is a mean to convey happiness and fun as well as messages for kids around the world. It also is artistic not to use taboo words in the target culture especially when the audience is children. The present research focused on mothers' attitude towards taboo words in Persian dubbed version of *SpongeBob SquarePants* (1999) animation series. The research is the qualitative method; a questionnaire has been devised to give a test from the mothers who had children between 2 to 10 years of age. It distributed through 30 mothers in a kindergarten. In addition, the researcher had an interview including three questions from aforementioned mothers who accepted to answer the questions. From the result it can be concluded that the mothers were worried about their kids, considering inappropriate words in Persian dubbed version of this cartoon. As a matter of fact *SpongeBob* translators seek attraction for all ages by using taboo words in this animation, according to their parents' point of view, and they were successful if it is laid aside the children learning and training age.*

KEYWORDS: *Cartoon translation, *SpongeBob*, Persian dubbing, Mother's attitude*

INTRODUCTION

It is expected that the dubbed version of the cartoons meet satisfaction of both parents and children. Parents satisfaction, from the aspect of learning good things and not having bad phrases or words, and children's, from the aspect of amusement and entertainment should be taken into account. Cartoons in this era of development play a crucial role in entertaining kids; parents also are very sensitive about the content and language of the animation engaging their children. Children, as learners, pay attention to the whole aspects of the cartoons including aesthetics, vocabulary selection, and even songs. Therefore, selecting words that are not proper from the aspect of religion or culture might bring about some difficulties.

According to Bassnett (1992) makes a relationship between the language and human being as language is "the hear within the body of a culture"(p.14). he keeps on elaborating the matter in

the same page that “the surgeon operating on the heart, cannot neglect the body that surrounds it, so the translator treats the text in isolation from the culture at his peril.” There have been done a lot of studies regarding this matter to clarify the impacts of cartoons on children. However, there is lack of study in children dubbing. Not only cartoons are made for entertaining kids, but also educating them. Children learn a lot through watching cartoons, they learn different aspects of life like culture, tradition, the way of talking, values of the society, moral issues, and many other life styles. Therefore, translators play a crucial role in rendering the content of a cartoon to kids, and they need to be very sensitive on their translations. Lawrence Venuti (1995) who is a professor of English at Temple University, Philadelphia explains the history of translation as “theories and practices which make it possible to counter the strategy of fluency, aiming to communicate linguistic and cultural differences instead of removing them.”(p.1).

Nowadays taboo words or dirty words are being used in some cartoons, which is a very hard task to translate them in a way that makes no problem in the countries which are socio-culturally different from the Source language cartoons. According to Larson and Mildred (1998) is used to “avoid the disapproval from the society. It is the replacement of taboo expression by another that is not coarse. A euphemism is a figurative expression, which is in some ways like metonymy. There is the substitution of one word for another of one expression to another. But, a euphemism is used to avoid an offensive expression, or one that is socially unacceptable, or one that is unpleasant.” (p.126).

Taboo words in *SpongeBob* series as an animated American cartoon can be easily found. The main character of this cartoon, *SpongeBob* absorbed adults and children immediately. It appears that the word he uses in his conversation is very interesting for people but translators of this loveable cartoon should be aware of the fact that the audiences are children. Dries (1995) also mentions that “dubbing is a process which involves many stages besides that of language transfer, so that a large number of additional factors (such as the use of up-to-date equipments, the choice of actors, the skill of the editor and standard of sound engineering) also contribute to the quality of the dubbing.” (p.12) Therefore, this qualified and skillful cartoon needs to be revised partly in the process of vocabulary selection in the area of children in both original language and dubbed version of that.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To what extent the translation of SpongeBob is satisfactory in parents' point of view?

METHODOLOGY

In the present article the researcher has investigate the mothers' attitude towards translation of taboo words in dubbed version of *SpongeBob* series by performing two tasks. The material that was applied for this article is divided into three parts. The first part is including the researcher's dissertation which has been done in 2018, titled “An investigation of taboos in dubbed version *SpongeBob* series based on Venuti” by Asieh Hadavand Khani and Naeimeh Tabatabaei Lotfi, fifteen sessions from the first season of the cartoon were chosen randomly. Then the researcher

began to highlight the taboo words or sentences, and find out how they have been translated. It is worth mentioning that taboos are the words or phrases that are less used in cartoons, however, the collected taboos which are called inappropriate or forbidden words and phrases according to the perspective of mothers were categorized under following titles based on Venuti's model of translation:- Euphemism- Deletion- Taboo to Less taboo- Taboo to Non-taboo. After collecting the data, the percentage was taken and it was clearly shown that non-taboo to taboo with percentage of 49.23% has got the highest proportion of all other items. The researcher, from this high percentage, could clearly conclude that translation of cartoons are moving towards taboo words in order to make fun for every one without considering that the most important audience of cartoons are children.

The second part of the material is a questionnaire which has been provided by the researcher including 25 questions regarding the translation of taboo words in so called cartoon. The questionnaire was tested from 30 mothers who claimed that they have watched the series of *SpongeBob*. The aforementioned mothers were the participants of the study. The third part of the material section was three questions written by the researcher as an interview which have been asked from 15 mothers of a kindergarten. Both the questionnaire and the interview were confirmed by two professors of Shahr-e-Qods University. The materials of the study have chosen to elicit the true results related to the research question.

The aim of the researcher was to find the amount of mothers' satisfaction from dubbed version of *SpongeBob* series from the aspect of taboo translation. In order to measure parent's satisfaction about *SpongeBob* series, two common questions were asked concerning the common issues on watching the cartoon. The general questions are the range of the children ages and their gender. These two questions don't affect the result of the text. However, it was important for the researcher to know about this information which could be analyzed and studied later. The questionnaire including 25 questions has been presented in the appendix of the article. The pattern of the measurement in the questionnaire is the bar chart. The researcher selected some important questions and put them into bar charts, then got the percentages to enrich the results of the article. Hence, the so called two general questions are as follows:

– How old is your kid?

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| a) 2 - 4 | c) 6 - 8 |
| b) 4 - 6 | d) 8 - 10 |

– What is the gender?

- a) Male
b) Female

Another item that the researcher has been taken into account is an interview which consists of three questions. In order to answer the questions the participants were to choose between the options of (Agree, Disagree, Almost agree, and No opinion). To gather more information, the researcher found out how the kids use taboos without knowing the meaning of them or how they

select or use inappropriate words from cartoons, and how the parents treat when they encounter an inappropriate word or phrase in a cartoon.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher, for getting a better result, has selected some significant questions (5, 6, 17, 22, 23) from the questionnaire based on the highest proportion of agreement among mothers. After that, she received the statistical amounts. Then, she put the percentage of the three items (Agree, Disagree, Almost Agree,) in the bar charts and analyzed them. It is worth mentioning that the No opinion item was not selected by anybody Therefore, the researcher omitted this item from the bar charts. The forgoing questions have been chosen based on the highest proportion of agreement among mothers.

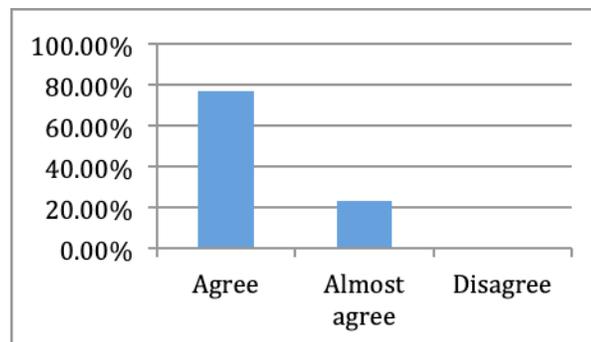


Figure 1: Question 5 (Learning taboo words is destructive)

Question number five of the questionnaire suggests that learning the taboos in translation of *SpongeBob* is destructive for your kid. According to the given information in figure 1, mothers mostly were in agreement and some were almost agree with the statement. However, nobody disagree with it.

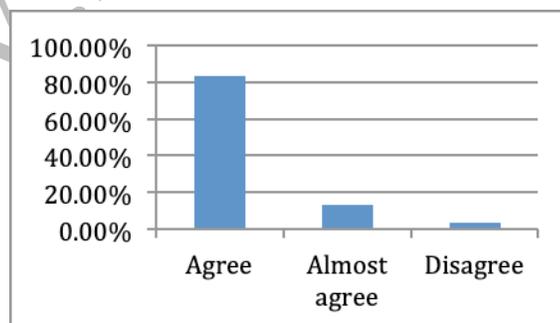


Figure 2: Question 6 (Changing taboos to non-taboos in translation)

Next is that Taboos should change into Non-taboos in translation of *SpongeBob*. Figure 2 clearly shows that more than 80% of mothers agree with changing taboos to non-taboo. It means that almost all mothers do not like their children to be in exposure of inappropriate words. It seems that there are words and phrases that are considered as taboos for Iranian whereas they are not bad words for western culture. Similarly, from the above mentioned

percentage can conclude that the differentiation in culture makes the translators' work more difficult. This issue pushes the translators toward catching information from both cultures.

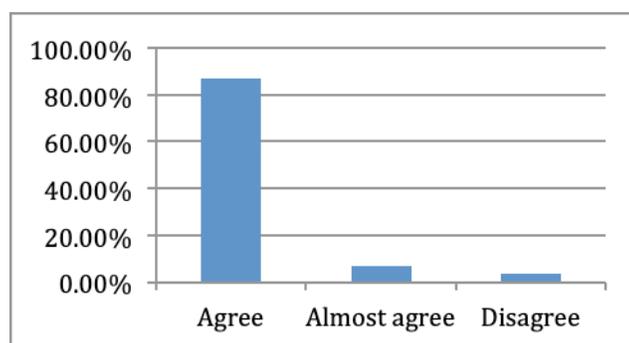


Figure 3: Question 17 (Cartoon translators should translate for kids)

Question 17 entitled that cartoon translators shouldn't be allowed to translate for kids. In first glance, it can be figured out that mothers prefer translators to be in particular for kids since it seems to be trained to translate especially for kids regarding the limitations they encounter in comparison with adults translation. Based on the information in figure 3, only 3.33% of mothers disagree with this issue. Almost agree has got a slight difference with disagree and agree takes the highest proportion of all.

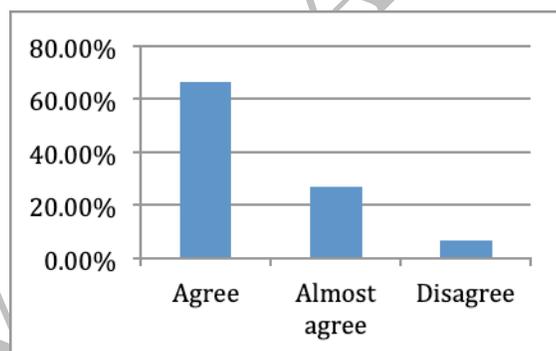


Figure 4: Question 22 (Cartoon translation is going towards taboos)

The next question which has gone under statistical issue is that cartoon translation is going towards taboos nowadays. As opposed to a decade ago, translators apply taboos more than before. This is somehow related to difference in speaking manners and development of the societies. Because, as there can be seen in the developed societies slangs are getting worse and more people are using them in their everyday conversation. In view of figure 4, mothers agree or almost agree on the whole and only 6.67% of mothers disagree with this issue.

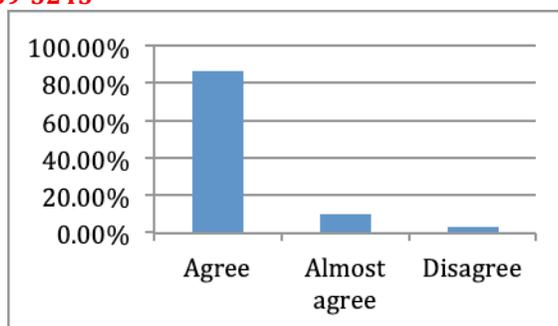


Figure 5: Question 23 (The difference between taboo words among children and adults)

The last question that has been selected is that some words in *SpongeBob* are not taboos among adults while this is opposite among children. Due to the fact that there are words or phrases that are not inappropriate or taboos for adults, on the contrary, they differ for children from their parent's eye and they consider as taboo words for them. By the same token, there can be seen in figure 5 that more than 80% of mothers agree with this issue and only 3.33% of them disagree and the rest almost agree. This shows that mothers believe that adults and children should have their own languages and it is not proper to use similar vocabularies for children and adults.

The following questions have been asked from the mothers:

1. It is said that kids use taboos without knowing the real meaning of them, please give an example.
2. Do you think your kid selects and uses inappropriate words from cartoons?
3. How do you treat when you and your kid encounter an inappropriate word or phrase in a cartoon?

The researcher selected one answer for each question to present here. Question 1 was asked a mother who had a 3 year old boy. She said that my son finds some of the words from the cartoons practical and he tries to use them in different connotations without knowing what those words or phrases mean. He usually uses them for every situation that he finds it proper to apply. The example was exactly one of the data collected by the researcher. The mother explained that in one of the episodes named 'Boating School' *SpongeBob* is walking happily and sings "حاضرم ضر" "حاضرم ضرم ضر ضر ضر" my kid learned "ضر ضر" and now he is using that in all contexts that he feels like using it, for example he applies this "ضر ضر" in playing time when the telephone rings or when it's time to go over and see his grandma as a buzzing sound. He pushes an imaginary button on the door as the doorbell and repeats this expression in a very funny and cute way. The mother mentioned that when the family, for example, his aunts or uncles hear this expression from him with that cute voice and rhythm, they like it a lot. However, I'm afraid my son applies this expression for a person out of the family which, in that case, is so embarrassing. Although the mother was upset about this, she ignored his son to let him forget it. She also mentioned that she always asks others not to laugh when her son uses bad words unmeaningly. She expressed that this is the translator's fault. The translator should notice that this animated cartoon is made for children and it is not a good idea to use these kinds of words to make the cartoon funnier. It is worth mentioning that these types of phrases or words are interesting for

adults and they even find them as the art of the translator because these funny words or expressions have been created by the translator. However, they are considered as taboo words for children.

About the second question, a mother told a memory when she was on the shopping with her four year old daughter. She explained that 'one day we went shopping and my daughter saw a beautiful lucky box. She asked me to buy that for her and every time she demanded I refused. Since the lucky box was very expensive in comparison with the fact that I knew it was not worth buying it. After asking for three times and hearing 'No' from me, she said: 'Mom, cut the crap and buy that for me, please.' (مامان مزخرف نگو. لطفا برام بخرش!) I just stared at her with wide eyes and could say nothing. Later I asked her whether she heard this 'cut the crap' at the kindergarten. She said that when she was watching *SpongeBob*, Squidward (*SpongeBob's* neighbor) told that. From that time on, I started to be more precise in the translation of cartoons and unfortunately I realized that the dubbed version of animations in the market consist of inappropriate words. Therefore, I need to notify my daughter and ask her to avoid watching them as far as possible or at least she can watch them in their original language.'

The third question was how the parents treat when their kids learn and repeat improper words. The answers were very interesting. Some of them told that sometimes they use opposite training by employing taboos in *SpongeBob* and other recently dubbed cartoons. In other words, they ask their kids to recognize and show taboos to mothers then it's time to discourage them and talk about those inappropriate words or phrases as well as explaining that they are improper words and children should avoid them.

CONCLUSION

The present study is an investigation of Mothers' attitude towards taboo words in Persian dubbed version of *SpongeBob* series. For achieving this, the researcher prepared a questionnaire and tested from the mothers who had children from 2 to 10 years of age. In addition she provided a three questions interview from so called mothers for getting a better result. According to the results of the questionnaire and interview, parents suggested not to translate taboos because these kinds of words or phrases affect children as learners of a language and trainees of manners. They also added that children are in their crucial time of learning, therefore, translators should take this important point into account and be more sensitive selecting words for children translation. Consequently, kids' translators should adapt the dubbed version of cartoons to their age group.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study are including some constraints which the researcher is not able to control them. Here is presented some important ones as follows:

1. The accessibility of the viewpoints of scholars in Iran was low.
2. Although the study investigates the term taboo, it is not able to take care of food taboos or body taboos, and other types of taboos since they are not relevant to the field of translation.

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APPENDIX

Parents Satisfaction about SpongeBob Series

1 – Taboos are considered different among children and adults.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

2 – There are taboos in translation of SpongeBob.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

3 – Your kid recognizes the taboos in translation of SpongeBob?

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

4 – Your kid is collecting taboos of the translation.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

5 – Learning the taboos in translation of SpongeBob is destructive for your kid.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

6 – Taboos should change into non-taboos in translation of SpongeBob.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

7 – This cartoon is popular among kids for its fun pictures, songs and colors rather than taboo words?

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

8 – You feel annoyed when your kid repeats the taboos in translation of SpongeBob.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

9 – The translation of SpongeBob is more appropriate for adults than kids.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

10 – You are satisfied with this cartoon from the taboo translation point of view.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

11 – You keep the translation of SpongeBob away your children.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

12 – Taboos should be used for making SpongeBob more fun.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

13 – SpongeBob translators should have noticed vocabulary selection since this cartoon has been made for kids.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

14 – SpongeBob translation should be reformed regarding the taboos.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

15 – SpongeBob will lose its popularity among kids if reformation happens.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

16 – Changing taboos to non taboos results in losing attraction of this cartoon?

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

17 – Cartoon translators shouldn't be allowed to translate for adults.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

18 – SpongeBob is interesting for adults because of its translation regarding taboos.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

19 – The translator should omit the taboos from this cartoon.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

20 – Taboos can be more noticed in the translation rather than the original.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

21 – You prefer to buy the original rather than translation of that.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

22 – Cartoon translation is going towards taboos nowadays.

- a) Agree
b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
d) No opinion

23 – Some words in SpongeBob are not taboos among adults while this is opposite among children.

- a) Agree
- b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
- d) No opinion

24 – The art of dubbing can be useful to avoid taboos in translation of SpongeBob since Iranians are very good at it.

- a) Agree
- b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
- d) No opinion

25 – SpongeBob translation belongs to the market rather than kids themselves.

- a) Agree
- b) Disagree
- c) Agreed to some extent
- d) No opinion

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