

Agency in the Translation and Production of Novels from English in Modern Iran

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ABSTRACT

Translation Studies researchers using sociological approaches to translation are now exploring the concept of agency. Modern Iran, given its specific geo-political, socio-cultural, and ideological context, is a revealing case in point in providing insight not only into the role of translation agents and their agency, but also into understanding the ways they exercise it. Drawing mainly on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and disposition, and partially on two principles of Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (i.e. following the actors and examining inscriptions), this thesis aims at describing and examining agency in the translation and production of novels from English in modern Iran, taking translators and publishers as the main translation agents.

The study poses three main questions: who decides what to translate, what motivates translators and publishers to translate and produce novels from English, and what constrains or enhances their agency. These questions are then put into a three-tier model of agency, using a multi-method approach of historical and archival studies, quantitative data on translation flow, and case studies in the form of interviews and participant observation. The findings show that translation agents have been able to voice their agency, despite the complicated nature of political Iran. Moreover, Iranian translators perform just as important a role in selecting novels for translation as the publishers. The motivations of translation agents also range from social and cultural motives to more professionally oriented ones. Finally, various textual and contextual factors have constrained the translation agents' practice; nonetheless, they have historically used multiple coping strategies, such as going into exile and translating the classics, in order to maintain their position in the publishing field in modern Iran. The implications of such findings for the fields of Translation Studies, Iranian Studies, and the publishing industry are also discussed.

KEYWORDS: agency, agents, Bourdieu, capital, field, modern Iran, sociological approaches to translation.

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