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Subtitling Power and Promise: A Critical Sociolinguistic Analysis of Directive and Commissive Speech Acts in the Iranian Television Series Shahrzad

Linguistics Society of Iran

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses a critical gap in audiovisual translation research, examining how power and promise are rendered in Persian historical dramas. To this end, the intricate use of speech acts was analyzed in the dialogs of the acclaimed Iranian television series 'Shahrzad', set against the turbulent backdrop of Iran in the 1950s. Through a detailed analysis of the first season, the central role of speech acts in shaping the characters, progressing the plot and reflecting the socio-political tensions of the time is elaborated. The methodology employed includes qualitative content analysis, drawing on Bourdieusian critical analysis of speech acts to examine interactions between the main characters in order to uncover the nuanced strategies used to convey authority, intimacy, deception and resistance. The results show how the series uses directives to depict complex interpersonal relationships and social hierarchies. Most importantly, the speech acts serve as a lens through which the intricate web of personal and political intrigue is illuminated, reflecting the interplay between individual desires and collective cultural norms. The analysis also shows how the speech acts help to construct a narrative that is both historically resonant and thematically rich, offering insights into the struggles for power, love and autonomy. This study has implications for critical translation pedagogy and decolonizing audiovisual translation practices. It also contributes to sociolinguistics by demonstrating how directive speech acts in media narratives can transcend purely linguistic functions and serve as central vehicles ideology, power asymmetries, cultural (re)production, and the politics of translation.

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1. Introduction

Speech act theory, a central area of pragmatics in sociolinguistic research, is closely related to recent research on pragmatics as carried out by scholars in Translation Sudies such as Polcz, (2020) in AVT. Speech act is concerned with the multifaceted role of language and assumes that words are used not only to convey information but also to perform various actions (Searle 1969). The translation of dialogues in films and series acts beyond linguistic transfer as it embodies a discursive practice that enact ideological positions, power relations, and cultural representation through linguistic elements. Translating speech acts and narrative dynamics from Persian to English subtitles requires careful attention to linguistic, cultural, and emotional nuances. Challenges include conveying culture-specific acts such as ta'arof, maintaining emotional tone, and preserving narrative coherence. Such issues can be more intensified in the case of interlingual subtitling where direct translation may not capture all cultural or contextual subtleties (Frumuselu et al., 2015). Against the backdrop of Iranian cinema, the intricate interplay of speech acts in the dialogs of the acclaimed Iranian television series 'Shahrzad', set in the socio-politically turbulent era of the 1950s in Iran, offers a unique but under-researched site for linguistic and cultural analysis through the lens of pragmatics. The analysis of this series gains urgency due to featuring contested historical periods in Iran, including the 1950s decade following the CIA-backed coup. In this context, directive and commissive speech acts work as primary linguistic mechanisms for enacting patriarchal control, class-based authority, and gender differences.

Despite a number of studies on cross-cultural and multilingual studies in the Iranian context on movies and series (e.g., Moafian et al., 2022; Yaqubi, 2020) and strategies for subtitling and dubbing of Iranian series (Ghajarieh et al. 2024), there is limited scholarship on how subtitle translators have used various strategies to translate the pragmatic effects of Iranian series in the circulation of ideological conflicts and cultural representation through critical-historical analysis of a Persian series. Addressing this gap can not only enrich the Translation Studies discipline, but also offer new insights into the complex interplay of language, culture and history in media narratives. Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and cross-cultural pragmatics (Wierzbicka, 2003) are important theoretical foundations for this research with a clear link of speech acts to politeness and cross-cultural language use on the translated screen.

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For the purposes of this study, the following research questions are adopted:

1. What are the frequencies of directive and commissive speech acts used in the dialogs of 'Shahrzad', contributing to the representation of character development and interpersonal dynamics in the context of 1950s Iran?

2. To what extent do such speech acts in 'Shahrzad' reflect the socio-political tensions and cultural norms of 1950s Iran, and how do they contribute to the ideological conflicts?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Speech Acts

Speech acts play an important role in conveying pragmatic equivalence, which is a type of equivalency highlighted by Baker (1992) beyond word level. As for the importance of speech acts in pragmatics, pragmatic equivalence means performing the same speech act with the same communicative and relational effect in the same context (Kallia, 2009).

Central to this theory is the division of utterances into three distinct categories: locutionary acts, which refer to the act of utterance, illocutionary acts, which refer to the intention behind the utterance, and perlocutionary acts, which refer to the effect of the utterance on the hearer (Austin 1962). This three-part framework provides a nuanced lens through which to analyze the complexity of human communication and provides insight into the implicit acts performed through speech.

The study of speech act theory is not limited to theoretical linguistics, but extends to a wide range of disciplines interested in the intricacies of human interaction. As Kemmerling (2002) vividly demonstrates, the study of speech act theory provides a deep understanding of the multiple functions of language in social discourse and reveals the myriad ways in which verbal exchanges shape and are shaped by human relationships.

Within the wide-ranging field of speech act theory, Searle's explanation of five illocutionary points is a seminal contribution, outlining the multiple goals that speakers can achieve with their utterances (Searle, 1969). This categorization, a cornerstone of linguistic pragmatics, has significantly advanced research across a wide range of disciplines including philosophy, cognitive science and linguistics.

Searle assumes that the illocutionary force of an utterance can be divided into five main categories: assertive, commissive, directive, declarative and expressive (Vanderveken &

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Kubo, 2002). Assertive utterances refer to the speaker's representation of states or conditions in the world and serve to confirm or deny statements based on the speaker's belief in their truthfulness. Commissives, on the other hand, reflect the speaker's commitment to a future action and essentially commit the speaker to a specific or implied action. Directives aim to influence the behavior or actions of the listener. They embody commands, requests or suggestions that are intended to provoke a reaction or action. Declaratives are characterized by their transformative power, i.e. the act of utterance itself brings about a change in the external situation or status, such as in official announcements or institutional declarations. Finally, expressives convey the speaker's psychological state or emotional disposition towards a particular situation, entity or event and thus provide insight into the speaker's subjective perspective.

Searle's contributions to speech act theory have undeniably enriched the study of pragmatics, but they have not been without controversy. A major criticism relates to the basis of Searle's, and by extension Austin's, framework, which is said to rely heavily on their intuitive understanding of language and often abstracts sentences from their real contextual use (Barron 2003). Critics argue that this approach overlooks the complex interplay between linguistic form and communicative function. They assume that the essence of a speech act goes beyond the mere structural boundaries of a sentence and embodies a broader communicative intention within an interactive discourse.

Research on Persian communication shows how cultural values influence directive talk. Studies by Salmani Nodoushan (2008) pointed out that directives in Persian reflect respect and hierarchy. The study draws on relational closeness and social roles. Sharifian's (2011) work on cultural conceptualizations showed that ideas linked to honor and collective identity inform how speakers frame obligation and deference. His cultural conceptualization theory clear shows how culture, identity and language are interconnected and should be examined through the lens of collective cognition and language

2.2. Studies on Speech Acts in Audiovisual Translation

Various studies in speech act translation of audiovisual materials can be categorized into different themes. Some studies focused on speech acts and politeness in AVT while others explored themes that included speech acts and politeness and speech acts and cultural specificity. For example, Bruti (2009) explored politeness and analyzed the speech act of insults in the film dialogues. The research found a tendency to tone down explicit insults in

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order to avoid informal or colloquial words that could potentially be censored. Of particular note was the translation of explicit racial slurs where the religious connotations were removed and replaced with another explicit slur that was equally offensive but did not contain racial connotations. She concluded that changes in linguistic form and style can alter the audience's interpretation of the social relationships portrayed in the film. Another study by Napoli (2020) sheds light on the relationship between linguistic (im)politeness and audiovisual translation, focusing in particular on the speech act of requests in English films and their dubbed Italian versions. This study shows how linguistic changes in dubbing can affect the (im)politeness of speech acts and emphasizes the importance of maintaining the equivalence of speech acts in translation for dubbing. One study by Polcz (2020) also explored the pragmatic equivalence applied in dubbing an American TV series focusing on the translation strategies and pragmatic equivalence in audiovisual translation with a focus on politeness. The research offered valuable insights into the application of descriptive and comparative methods in speech act translation within the audiovisual context.

In the case of cultural specificity, Pinto (2010) conducted a study on the translation of speech acts in the English subtitles of twelve Spanish films. The purpose of the study was to understand why American students often perceive Spaniards as rude after watching Spanish movies with English subtitles. The study was based on the assumption that Spanish culture tends to favor positive politeness through direct interaction, while English-speaking cultures tend to favor negative politeness and prefer a more indirect approach to communication.

In another study on cultural specificity, Hashemian (2014) also investigated the common patterns of requesting in adult Persian and English speakers. They found that Persian culture is more direct and focuses on positive politeness, while Canadian culture is more indirect and focuses on negative politeness. Positive politeness strategies are those that make the listener feel good, such as complimenting, agreeing, or offering help. Negative politeness strategies are those that minimize the listener's imposition, such as using indirect language, apologizing, or offering options. The study also found that Iranians showed more variation in the execution of their requests and were more sensitive to power differentials.

Zandmoghadam and Vafaeimehr (2017) also analyzed the speech acts of agreement and disagreement used by native Persian and English speakers in their comment tags on Facebook. For this purpose, a corpus of 1196 comments was collected and analyzed based on the existing models of speech act strategies. It was also analyzed which strategies they use to

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express their feelings when agreeing or disagreeing in their comments. The results show that there is a significant difference between native English and Persian speakers in terms of the strategies they use for the speech acts of agreeing and disagreeing and expressing their feelings when agreeing and disagreeing.

Themed on power and speech act, Ahmadi Safa and Karbakhsh Ravari (2021) examined the functions of the speech act of flattery in Persian and English. To this end, flattery was identified and extracted from a corpus of 60 Persian-language and 60 English-language film scripts from different film genres, including social and family films, dramas, science fiction, and romance films produced between the years 2010-2020. A sample of 343 Persian and 228 English flatteries was extracted and analyzed using Hymes' (2005) model. The results indicated that flattery was used in both Persian and English culture to exert a positive influence on the addressees. Moreover, flattery was used in both languages in both formal and informal situations to deceive, praise, and ridicule. Although flattery occurs in both formal and informal situations in the Persian language and cultures, it is used more frequently in informal and private situations than in formal situations. It was also found that the frequency of flattery in Persian language and culture is significantly higher than in English. Specific speech acts such as requests, offers, invitations, compliments, etc., which have been extensively researched in cross-cultural pragmatics and literary translation, receive relatively little attention in AVT. Most of the research in AVT focuses on insults, flattery, and advice. Focusing more on translation studies research, Violita and Cholsy (2022) examined the translation of speech acts in the Indonesian subtitles of the Netflix film "Enola Holmes"," focusing on the adventure and mystery genres. It used a qualitative descriptive approach with content analysis to assess how well the subtitles reflect the original speech acts. The results show that the message is consistent with the context of the story when the speech acts of the source text have been translated correctly. However, if the equivalence of the speech acts is not achieved, the translation struggles to capture the essence of the story. The research has shown how important it is to achieve speech act equivalence in order to maintain the integrity of the narrative in translation.

3. Theoretical Framework

Despite a wide range of studies on speech cat, this study strives to shed light on how speech act performs in AVT when they are analyzed in a Persian series through the critical-historical lens with a focus on power, ideology and cultural differences.

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This study used Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) field theory, reconsidering translation of speech acts in audiovisual materials as a mechanism within the cinema's field of cultural production. Within this theoretical framework, the habitus of the translator is discussed and connected to social power, ideology, history and culture. In terms of Bourdieu's assumptions, the translator's familiarity with Persian sociopragmatic norms and 1950s Iranian historical context and their symbolic power through having authority represent (or misrepresent) the source culture's power dynamics. Viewing strategies as practices reframes expansion as neutral classification but as a choice arguably reproducing power and ideology.

4. Methodology

4.1. Design of The Study

The primary approach of the current research is descriptive-analytical and focuses on the product. To answer the research question, a comparative model was used in this study, a methodology that plays an important role in corpus-based studies. In the descriptive analysis, the original text is contrasted with the translation to identify strategies. At the critical level, the study analyzed how social and political influences affected translation norms and conventions through Bourdieu's field theory with a focus on how the translator's habitus is linked to social power, ideology, history, and culture. The translator's power as the authority to represent or misrepresent power and ideology is considered as well. Season 1 of Shahrzad was selected as it depicts the core power dynamics, including patriarchal control, political resistance, and Shahrzad's constrained agency.

4.2. Corpus

For this study, a successful Iranian television series, Shahrzad, was selected for investigation. Shahrazad is a drama, history, and romance series with 26 episodes, each of which has a running time of 60 minutes. It was directed by Hassan Fathi and produced by Mohammad Emami in 2014. Through its depiction of social and political tensions and culturally embedded norms in 1950s Iran, the series provides particularly rich data for examining how speech acts are performed, negotiated, and ideologically framed by the characters.

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4.3. The Plot

Shahrzad, a medical student, and Farhad, a literature student and journalist, are in love and want to get married. The fathers of the two work for a large mafia called Bozorg Agha. During the events of the 28th of Mordad, Farhad is about to be executed, but Bozorg Agha intervenes and saves him. When Farhad feels better after this incident, he decides to propose to Shahrzad. Everyone is overjoyed, except for Shahrzad's father, Jamshid, who is against the marriage. On the other hand, Bozorg Agha has a daughter named Shirin, who is married to her cousin Ghobad. Although Ghobad does not love Shirin, he is forced to stay with her due to Shirin's feelings for him and Bozorg Agha's influence. Despite his efforts for Shirin, they are unable to have children and often argue about the cause of this problem. Bozorg Agha, frustrated with the situation and in search of an heir, decides that a new woman should become his son-in-law's second wife to solve the problem. Surprisingly, Bozorg Agha suggests that Shahrzad become Ghobad's wife. This is the prelude to unexpected events and conflicts that change their lives.

4.4. Procedure

The present study adopts a critical, corpus-based approach to analyzing Persian dialogues and their English subtitles, with the aim of examining the treatment of directive and commissive speech acts in subtitling. First, the speech acts occurring in the original films had to be identified using Searle's (1969) directive and commissive speech acts. Polcz's (2020, p. 62) categorization was also adopted, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

A Taxonomy of Directive and Commissive Speech Acts

Instruction	The hearer has no choice but to carry out the action due to the speaker's authority.
Request	The hearer's willingness to perform the action is crucial.
Advice	The speaker intends to help the hearer.
Invitation	The speaker expresses a desire for the hearer's company
Offer	The speaker intends to provide the hearer with something (food, drink, seat, activity, etc.).

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Polcz (2020) suggests that translators should consider several key factors when distinguishing between different types of speech acts, such as request, instruction, advice, and offer. If it is clear from the context that the listener is willing to perform the action, it is called a request. An instruction, on the other hand, is characterized by the fact that the hearer has no choice, as he is obliged to perform the action due to the authority of the speaker. If contextual clues indicate the speaker's intention to help the listener, the speech act is categorized as advice. An invitation expresses the speaker's desire for the hearer's company, while an offer is made with the intention of offering the hearer something, e.g., a meal, a drink, a place to sit, or an activity.

The possible responses to an utterance can also help to determine the speech act type. If the possible responses include okay, sure, all right, but no thank you, the speaker's intention is described as a request or instruction. If the possible responses include a thank you, the utterance is called an offer or invitation. In other words, if the utterance can lead the hearer to agree but not to say thank you, the type of speech act is called a request or instruction. If the utterance causes the hearer to say thank you, the speech act falls into the category of invitation, offer, or advice. The above options are usually considered preferred responses.

In this study, for capturing equivalence between SL and TL directive and commissive speech acts, pragmatic aspects of the utterances, i.e., directness and indirectness, the relationships between the characters in the course of the plot, and interpersonal relationships between the characters, considering the power relations and social distance between them, were considered.

The next step was to carefully examine the subtitles to find the English counterpart of the source film in the target subtitles. In this study, the typology of equivalence strategies proposed by Gottlieb (1992) was adopted to analyze the translation strategies used by the translators. Gottlieb's equivalence strategies provide a valuable framework for translators and subtitlers to produce effective and meaningful translations while taking into account the constraints of the target language and culture. Gottlieb's (1992) strategies consist of ten strategies, including:

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Table 2

Typology of Translation Strategies

Expansion	Adding more information to clarify or avoid ambiguity.
Paraphrase	Restating the meaning of a sentence in a different form
Transfer	Translating the source text directly without any changes
Imitation	Keeping elements of the source language (e.g., names, places) unchanged.
Transcription	Using a written representation of the original language in the target text (e.g., for unusual terms).
Dislocation	Changing the order of sentences or phrases to fit the target language's structure.
Condensation	Shortening the original text while retaining its meaning (e.g., using ellipses or abbreviations).
Decimation	Omitting non-essential parts of the original text
Deletion	Removing parts of the text that cannot be translated or are irrelevant
Resignation	Omitting untranslatable elements due to cultural differences or other challenges.

Speech act identification started by initial coding by the primary researcher using Polcz's (2020) taxonomy with contextual markers. This was followed by an independent second-coding of 20% of the corpus by a Persian-English bilingual expert. An 87% inter-coder reliability using Cohen's $\kappa = 0.82$ was established, indicating strong agreement between coders.

It is important to point out that the strategies proposed by Gottlieb (1992) were not selected as neutral descriptives, but rather as analytical categories showing ideological positioning. Each of these strategies was analyzed for their impact on illocutionary force, which indicates whether translation maintained the source directive's authority, agency representation, and cultural framing.

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5. Results

5.1. Directive Speech Acts in ST

The statistical analysis of the directive speech acts used in the film becomes more meaningful if we take into account the type and number of speech acts used as well as their distribution. If we take these factors into account, we can better understand the translation process and recognize patterns in the choice of translation strategies. In the study, each episode of this TV series was analyzed in detail based on the first and second research questions. The distribution and frequency of directive speech acts, categorized as Instructions, Requests, Advice, Invitations, and Offers, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

The Frequency of Directive Speech Acts in the Series Studied

Instruction	42%
Request	27%
Advice	23%
Invitation	20%
Offer	4%

For a better understanding, Figure 4.1 shows the statistical analysis of the types of directive speech acts and their frequency. The results of this statistical analysis and their implications are discussed in the following paragraphs.

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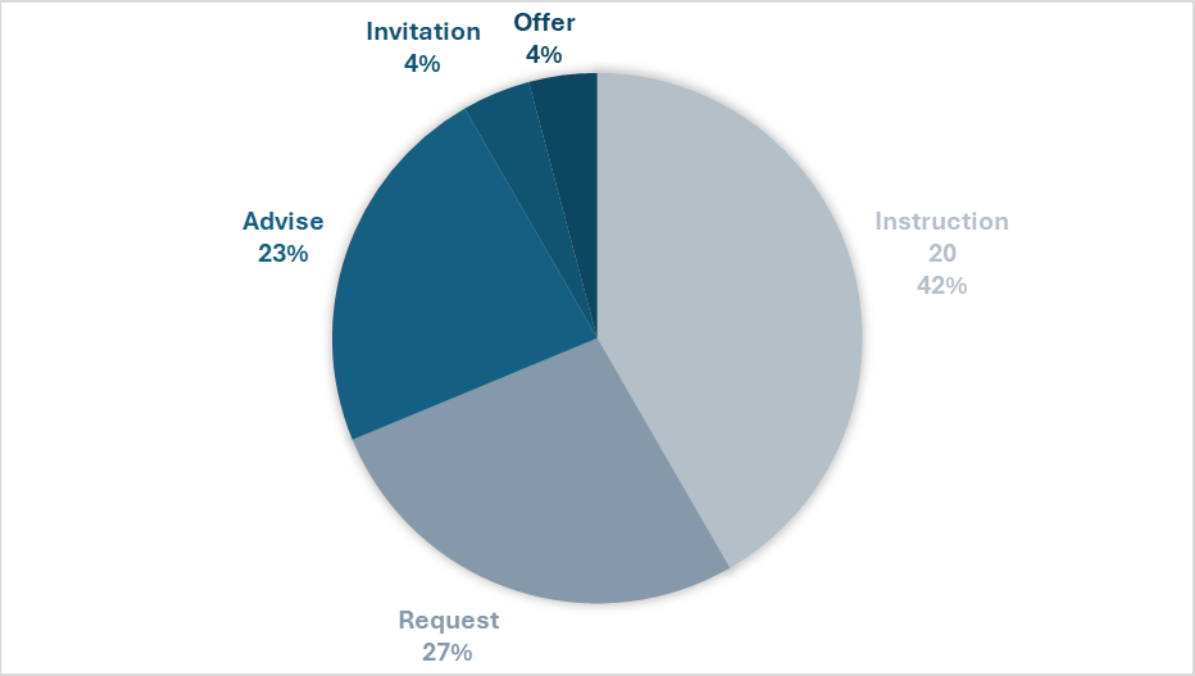
Figure 1

The Frequency of Directive Speech Acts in the Series Studied



5.2. Directive Speech Acts TT: Instruction

As already mentioned, directives are speech acts that aim to influence the listener's behavior. They include a range of expressions, from direct commands to subtle requests. The aim is to persuade the listener to take an action, be it closing a door, buying a product, or following an order. Directives can be direct (e.g., "Close the door!") or indirect (e.g., "It's cold in here"). The choice of directive depends on factors such as the relationship between the speakers, the desired level of politeness, and the context of the interaction. The instruction, as a type of directive speech acts refers to the fact that the hearer is obliged to follow the instruction because the speaker has authority over him/her. When the speaker gives an instruction, he/she feels empowered to place herself/himself above the hearer. This sense of power can arise from factors such as social position, age, expertise, or physical dominance. As a result, people are expected to obey the commands of those who have power over them. In other words, the speaker can give instructions to the listener because they have a certain amount of actual or perceived power over them. According to the results of this study, most instructions are used by the characters in the movie, accounting for 42% of all directive speech acts. Here are some interesting examples: Note: The code E stands for the respective number of episodes. The second two numbers indicate the minute and the second in which the utterance occurs in each episode.

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Table 4

Example of Directive Speech Act (Instruction). E1. 31:12

SL version	Subtitled version	Sociopragmatic variables	Translation strategy	Bourdieusian Critical Analysis
سیمین: منم می خواهم زن یکی بشم مثل فرهاد. مادر شهرزاد(پروین): هیس لعنت به شیطون بی حیا.	Simin: I want to marry someone like Farhad. Shahrzad's mother: shame on you! (in old Iran it wasn't appropriate for singles to talk about married life).	speech act type: Instruction power: S<H social distance: small with strong affect	Expansion	Reinforcing patriarchal control through moral shaming. expansion makes implicit cultural logic explicit for target audience but risks framing Persian family dynamics

In order to analyze the speech acts in the dialogues in more detail, it is important to first examine the overall context of the story in which the dialogues take place and the situation of the characters. The conversation takes place during a family breakfast after Farhad, Shahrzad's fiancé, is criticized and to express her solidarity with her sister Shahrazad. Simin says she wants to marry someone like Farhad. Her mother, Parvin, indirectly tells Simin to be quiet. She implicitly judges Simin's behavior as inappropriate. In line with the cultural context where women are expected to be submissive, silent, obedient, and openly expressing desires, especially in the context of marriage, could be seen as inappropriate or a challenge to traditional gender roles. Parvin indirectly instructs Simin to be quiet. The subtitler uses "Shame on you!" This is a more direct version than the SL version. Furthermore, although this expression in the subtitles does not explicitly give a command, it conveys a strong implicit instruction. In addition, the statement placed in brackets by the subtitler in the English subtitle provides an important cultural context that explains why the mother's reaction is so strong. With the expansion strategy, the translator attempts to convey some information about the context, information that is contained in the text as part of the characters' action situation in the story. The expansion strategy in this maternal instruction reveals translation's ideological work. By adding 'shame on you!' where the Persian relies on implicit cultural knowledge, the subtitle clarifies Persian familial discourse that requires translation and

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explanation for reproduction of power through the speech acts. From a critical perspective, the translation choice reproduces the source text's patriarchal ideology while neutralizing its effect by framing the concept as an old cultural practice.

Table 5

Example of Directive Speech Act (instruction) E4. 31:52.

SL version	Subtitled version	Sociopragmatic variables	Translation strategy	Bourdieusian Critical Analysis
شهرزاد:شما راضی میشی من زن دامادتون بشم وقتی دلم با یک دیگه است؟ بزرگ آقا: دلت به من چه! دل آدم یمین میره زندگی یسار هیچ وقت هم به هم نمی رسن. تو دلت رو برای خودت نگه دار بشین سر سفره ای که من و بابات بهت میگیم.	Shahrzad: are you happy that I marry your son-in-law when my heart is with someone else? Bozorgaqa: I don't care about your heart! Heart goes right, life goes left. They never meet each other. You keep your heart for yourself. Just marry who I and your father tell you.	speech act type: Instruction power: S<H social distance: small with strong affect	Transfer	Violating familial norms in 1950s, representing patriarchal power through instruction speech act

Shahrazad, who is betrothed to Farhad, is forced by Bozorgaqa, who acts like a godfather in the story, to marry his son-in-law. The reason for this is that Bozorgaqa has no children, apart from his daughter Shirin, who cannot have children, and that he wants to have an heir. These dialogs take place between the two. In fact, two categories of speech acts are used in this conversation: Request and Instruction. Shahrazad's dialog " شما راضی میشی من زن دامادتون بشم وقتی دلم با یک دیگه است." is a question with an implicit request. Shahrazad is asking a question with the intention of asking Bozorgaqa for approval or understanding of her situation. She is essentially asking him to reconsider her forced marriage. By formulating a request or inquiry as a question rather than a direct command, the speaker shows respect for the autonomy of the listener. It implies that the speaker values the listener's perspective and is open to their response.

On the other hand, Bozorgaqa directly commands Shahrazad to suppress her feelings and marry the man he has chosen for her. He does not ask for her consent, but dictates her actions. The speech act instructions in this dialog illustrate the power dynamics and social pressure Shahrazad is subjected to. Bozorgaqa's dominant and controlling use of language

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contrasts sharply with Shahrazad's more submissive and questioning tone. This exchange is a clear example of how language can be used to exert power and control over others. The same speech acts are conveyed in English conversation by “Just marry who I and your father tell you”. The translator demonstrates significant cultural capital through understanding that Simin's statement violates 1950s Persian norms around female modesty. The translation choice of transfer without paraphrasing reproduces blurs the meaning for the audience while indicating the authority of the translator to maintain ideology without taking a responsible measure to paraphrase or resist the existing ideology.

Table 6

Example of Directive Speech Act (Instruction). E1. 41:37.

SL version	Subtitled version	Sociopragmatic variables	Translation strategy	Bourdieusian Critical Analysis
پدر فرهاد(هاشم): ببین اگه می خواهی جَزَعُ فَزَع راه بندازی. من حرفم رو دَرز بگیرم برم پی‌کارم. شهرزاد: نه غلط کردم.	Farhad’s father (Hashem): if you wanna weep I can’t talk to you frankly. Shahrzad: okay I won’t.	speech act type: Instruction power: S>H social distance: small with strong affect	Paraphrase	habitus shaped by target language politeness conventions

During a coup, one of the thugs hired by the Bozorgaqa accidentally falls off a building during a confrontation with Farhad. The death is blamed on Farhad, and he is sent to prison. As a result, Farhad's family is distraught. In a private conversation between Farhad's father and Shahrazad, his fiancée, they talk about how to gain forgiveness from the victim's family. In the middle of their conversation, Shahrazad bursts into tears. Farhad's father stops her from crying with a direct order. The conversation between the two reflects the power of Farhad's father and conveys a sense of authority and a direct command to stop crying, emphasizing the dominance of the speaker. However, the English translation "if you wanna weep I can’t talk to you frankly" is more of a request or condition than a direct command, softening the tone and therefore the intended effect. In reality, the translator has only softened the tone of the utterance. Another term in this context that shows its instruction more " جَزَعُ فَزَع" (Jaz'a wa Faz'), the Arabic term used in the past, describes intense emotional turmoil and anxiety, which refers to inner distress; it can also manifest itself externally, for example, by crying in their conversation, which is paraphrased by the translator. The Persian phrase "من حرفم رو دَرز بگیرم برم

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"means a decision to remain silent, often out of regret or a desire to keep a secret, is also paraphrased by the translator. Although the paraphrasing does not reflect the exact wording of the SL version, it conveys the meaning of the utterance. Based on Bourdieusian analysis, the translator's habitus to use indirect request shaped by the target language politness suggest choice rather than command. This depicts less power asymmetry in the original text.

5.3. Directive speech acts: Request

A request is a polite or indirect instruction aimed at influencing another person's behavior without explicitly asking them to do something. It often involves a degree of politeness and consideration for the other person's feelings. According to the results of this study, the directive speech act (request) is used in 27% of cases. Some examples can be found below.

Table 7

Example of Directive Speech Act (Request). E8. 38:24.

SL version	Subtitled version	Sociopragmatic variables	Translation strategy	Bourdieusian Analysis
مادر فرهاد(مرضیه): سلام پروین: سلام مرضیه خانوم، سلام میترا جون به برکت این سفره عزیز حلال کن. هر چی باشه یه عمر نون و نمک هم رو خوردیم.	Marziyeh: Hello Parvin: Hello Marzieh and dear Mitra. Please forgive us for the sacred of this ceremony. We have been friends for a long time.	speech act type: request power: S=H social distance: small with strong effect	Paraphrase	Erasing ritual capital markers; domesticating Persian ta'arof protocol; neutralizing symbolic violence of broken engagement

Shahrzad has married Qobad, the son-in-law of Bozorgaqa, and they are invited to the sacred ceremony by Shirin, the first wife of Qobad. At the sacred ceremony, Shahrzad and her mother have an unexpected encounter with Farhad's mother, the mother of her former fiancé. Since Shahrzad is not married to Farhad, her mother wants his mother to forgive him. This led to the conversation shown in Table 4.5. In this conversation, Parvin asks for forgiveness. Parvin's speech act is a combination of a direct request for forgiveness and an emotional expression of regret and respect. Due to the specific cultural and social context, this act may be more than a request. Nevertheless, the translation adequately reflects the core meaning of the original Persian phrase and the speech act of the request.

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The English translation "Please forgive us for the sacred of this ceremony" fails to show multilayered cultural capital existing in this sentence. The phrase "for the sacred of this ceremony" is grammatically awkward, suggesting the translator's limited linguistic capita in English religious texts. This exchange also shows ta'arof, the Persian ritual politeness system that Sharifian (2011) identifies as central to Iranian communicative habitus.

Her words "نون و نمک خوردن" (eating bread and salt together) need cultural capital that co-eating creates moral obligation. The translator's paraphrase strategy showed a shifted habitus formed outside ta'arof fields. This reflects a translator habitus toward target culture communicative norms, where friendship is abstract relationship rather than shared material practice. Without explanations, for target audiences, this shapes perception that Iranian women's agency operates through emotional appeals.

Table 8

Example of Directive Speech Act (Request). E8. 05:00.

SL version	Subtitled version	Sociopragmatic variables	Translation strategy	Bourdieusian Analysis
قباد: بگو تو رو خدا بگو کله ام یکم کار کنه. من نمیدونم به این آرتیس جماعت چی بگم.	Qobad: just talk and enlighten me. I don't know what to say to these artists.	speech act type: request power: S<H social distance: small with strong affect	Decimation	Erasing male vulnerability marker and protecting artists' dignity

Now that Shahrzad is married to Qobad after a long time, they have a good relationship. One day, they talked about the movie Casablanca. A director is also supposed to meet with Bozoraqa and Qobad to talk about the production of the movie. Considering that Shahrzad is educated and knowledgeable, Qobad asks Shahrzad how he should deal with them. Qobad seems to feel overwhelmed or at a loss when dealing with artists. He is looking for advice on how to have a meaningful conversation with them. Looking at the pragmatic equivalence, the tone of Qobad's dialog contains a stronger request or demand. In translation, however, it appears as a command.

Bourdieu's (1993) concept of field autonomy can be used in 1950s Iran when artistic fields were separating autonomy from economic/political power. This forces Qobad to

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acknowledge his capital deficit while insulting in an implicit way by using آرتیس جماعت (artsy crowd) the cultural capital he lacks. This could be due to western artistic field norms that were protected by the translator's choice through removing contemptuous marking.

6. Discussion

The results of the study show that a range of directive speech acts were used in ten episodes of one season of the television series Shahrazad. Instructions and requests were the most common classifications of directive speech acts in Shahrazad series. The analysis revealed that directive speech acts—particularly instructions and requests—dominate the dialogic exchanges, comprising more than half of all identified illocutionary acts. Commissive acts, including promises and threats, also appeared frequently, albeit less prominently. This frequency suggests a high degree of inter-character negotiation, social obligation, and hierarchical interaction, which are essential elements in both plot development and sociolinguistic realism.

These findings are consistent with Searle's (1969) classification of illocutionary acts, where directives and commissives are essential to shaping interpersonal dynamics. In Shahrzad, characters such as Bozorg Agha use directives to reinforce authority, while characters such as Shahrzad or Farhad often engage in commissive acts that reflect personal agency and emotional investment. This supports Leech's (1983) politeness principle, where power dynamics and social distance heavily influence the form and frequency of directives.

The sociopolitical context of post-coup Iran (1950s) offers a fertile ground for such speech acts. Power hierarchies and familial obligations pervade the discourse, highlighting the cultural value placed on obedience and deference (Wierzbicka 2003). The high frequency of indirect directives, in particular, reflects the pervasive use of politeness strategies in Persian communication, which aim to mitigate face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The prominence of hierarchical directives and culturally inflected commissives in the original dialogs suggests a deliberate narrative choice that mirrors the patriarchal, authoritarian structures of mid-century Iran. Speech acts function here not merely as linguistic devices but as sociocultural indicators embedded in the narrative.

For example, Bozorg Agha's use of authoritative directives indexes not only his personal power but also his class status, reinforcing the symbolic fusion of political control

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and social hierarchy. In contrast, characters of lower status use more mitigated or indirect forms of speech, consistent with Persian sociopragmatic norms (Salmani Nodoushan 2008).

This pattern is closely aligned with Toury's (1995) norms theory, which argues that translation and narrative structure are deeply shaped by the socio-cultural context of both the source and target cultures. The alignment of speech acts with historical conditions reinforces the "cultural resonance" of the narrative (Hatim & Mason 1997), thereby anchoring the story's authenticity.

Furthermore, the interplay between speech act types and the narrative's thematic strands—such as love versus tyranny or tradition versus modernity—suggests that these pragmatic forms are deeply woven into the textual fabric of Shahrzad. Commissives, especially promises and threats, serve as vehicles for conveying personal sacrifice, resistance, and emotional intensity, reinforcing the dramatic tension of the story.

Regarding mismatches between these speech acts in the original Persian text and the English subtitles, and what this implies about translation strategies and challenges in AVT, the subtitle analysis revealed that the translation of speech acts often results in partial or reduced pragmatic equivalence. A study found that directness, mitigation, and illocutionary force were frequently altered or simplified in the target language (Polcz 2020).

For instance, Persian indirect directives—heavily reliant on shared cultural norms—were frequently rendered as more direct commands in English, likely due to constraints imposed by subtitling norms such as time compression and character limits (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2014). These shifts result in a loss of cultural nuance and pragmatic depth, confirming Gottlieb's (1992) observation that subtitling often entails a degree of "pragmatic flattening."

This aligns with previous research indicating that AVT, particularly subtitling, struggles with preserving illocutionary force due to spatial and temporal constraints (Pedersen 2011; Antonini 2005). Moreover, the transfer of commissive acts—especially promises—sometimes loses emotional subtlety or politeness strategies embedded in Persian (e.g., honorifics or modal verbs), reflecting the broader challenge of cross-cultural pragmatic equivalence (Baker 1992).

Research on subtitling emphasizes the crucial role of genre, theme, and plot in film translation. Chaume (2004) emphasizes the importance of genre in film studies and AVT. The television series Shahrazad, a drama, history, and love series depicting the socio-political

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tensions and cultural norms in Iran in the 1950s, exhibited a high frequency of directive speech acts (instructions). This study suggests that theme, plot, genre, and length of subtitle influence the use of directive speech acts in audiovisual texts. For example, the depiction of male dominance and social class differences in Shahrazad resulted in more direct and implicit directives. Translating implicit meanings in speech is more difficult than translating direct statements, especially when they are unconventional. To accurately convey the original message, subtitlers must effectively convey the intended meaning of the speech acts while maintaining the theme and characters of the text.

In relation to the second research question, investigating the strategies used by subtitlers in translating the identified directive speech acts, the study has shown that the main strategies of Gottlieb's (1992) framework, including expansion, paraphrase, transfer, decimation, as well as deletion, were used in translating the directive speech acts of the Shahrazad series. Since speech acts in general are culture- and language-dependent phenomena whose translation requires different types of translation shifts and strategies in TL, the evidence presented in this study suggests that translators did not follow any specific translation strategy when translating directive speech acts. These findings are consistent with the results of previous studies such as Ghourchian (2007), who supported the assumption that translators did not follow a specific translation strategy in translating speech acts to convey the exact meaning of the SL and they claimed that various factors such as the context of the situation, the context of the culture, etc. may influence the choice of translation.

7. Conclusion

This study analyzed directive and commissive speech acts in Shahrzad's Persian-English subtitles through a Bourdieusian critical sociolinguistic framework. The results suggest that audiovisual translation can be a site for exercising power and cultural norms and hierarchies. Translation functioned as a capital conversion crisis when Persian symbolic capital, such as history, culture, and norms, cannot be directly converted without educational explanations that target audiences and commercial constraints resist. Gendered and classed symbolic violence and positioning 1950s Iranian culture within global knowledge hierarchies were not adequately implemented by the habitus of the translator. The analysis also revealed that historical dramas could feature ongoing struggles over whose capital counts, whose historical agency gets recognized, and whose communicative complexity appears sophisticated versus primitive. Nevertheless, translation of these works may reproduce power

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imbalance, ideology and wrong perceptions in the audience's mind when the translator's habitus distort the meaning of the source language.

Shahrzad and its subtitles along with other historical dramas can serve as rich corpus for teaching students to recognize symbolic violence, norms and cultural capital. Developing translator reflexivity about how habitus generates choices that may resist symbolic violence in the source text. Future research can examine multiple genres, audience reception with capital-conscious alternatives. They should intersect their analysis with postcolonial and feminist translation frameworks. Each subtitle translator does not simply translate meaning; their choices mediate legitimacy in the determination of whose capital is to serve and whose complexity is to be recognized. Unless translation practices begin placing symbolic violence reduction alongside comprehension at the heart of their concerns, AVT will continue to reproduce global cultural hierarchies under the veneer of simply "translating."

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the research process.

Declaration

We declare that this manuscript is original and has not been submitted to any other journal for publication

Transparency Statements

The authors affirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article. Any additional data can be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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