

Audio Description Technology: Enhancing Communication of Culture-Bound Elements in Films

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Abstract Audio description (AD) technology, as a means of audiovisual translation (AVT), provides media accessibility (MA) for blind and partially sighted audiences. Through this innovative technology, the audio describer engages in real-time communication and gives a running commentary on the visual elements that are seen on the screen. The intersection of communication and technology in translation as reflected in how culture-bound elements are addressed in AVT has lately gained increasing attention. This phenomenological research aims to describe the solutions audio describers resort to for the rendition of culture-bound elements in Anglophone films into Persian. The audio descriptions of four Persian-dubbed English-language films were purposively selected as the sample corpus. The findings revealed that communication-centric strategies of specification, naming, and retention are, respectively, the most applied in the process of communicating the English culture-bound elements across the target culture by the audio describers. The implications of the findings for practice and theory are discussed.

Keywords: Audio description technology, Communication, Media, Audio describers, Translation

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1. Introduction

Currently, the audiovisual translation (AVT) technology is an extensively spanned area of practice that can take account of the different needs of a varied range of audiences and beneficiaries. It also provides accessibility and context for communication for people with special needs (such as subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing [SDH] and AD), along with providing this service for all kinds of audience groups who are willing to “achieve specific goals with effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction in a specific context of use” (Gambier, 2023, p. 3). Moreover, this technology, with its emphasis on effective communication, is appropriate for “assisting literacy developments and language acquisition” (Khoshsaligheh, Shokoohmand, et al., 2022, p. 2) and helping the immigrants willing to learn the host country’s language and culture.

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Therefore, accessibility of this practical knowledge, the translation, was made available through the screen and software technology for people who are willing to understand and communicate with the poly-semiotic texts originally prepared in a language different from their own (Díaz-Cintas, 2009; Gambier, 2019; Khoshsaligheh, Eriss, et al., 2022), and developed throughout the media, which can be considered “as a site of social and cultural exchange” (Biltreyst & Meers, 2018, p. 28). The amalgamation of such communication mediums with technology allows for interactive engagement between multi-semiotic artifacts and text and positively impacts to international cultural relations. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to explain the audio describers at Sevina Group (an Iranian non-governmental pioneering organization in offering AD services) as they use communication and technology in the process of conveying culture-specific details from English films into the Persian language. This research is focused on the examination of four selected English-language films whose audio description was Persian dubbed as the target corpus.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Audio Description Technology

First, it is worth mentioning that AD technology is a newly investigated topic in Iran, and only a few pioneering organizations are currently providing this service for Persian and foreign films. There is also a small number of research studies conducted on AD in this context (Khoshsaligheh & Shafiei, 2021; Khoshsaligheh, Shokoozmand, et al., 2022), which makes this study and the studies alike justifiable. Moreover, conducting further surveys in the field of AD can help researchers and practitioners improve the quality of audio-described products and establish guidelines specific to the context of Iran.

AD is a “narrative technique” (Conway et al., 2015, p. 5), considered as part of a larger whole and “a new form of intersemiotic translation” (Giovanni, 2024, p. 301), which Benecke (2007) and Núñez (2015) have similar viewpoints to hers. AD is used to replace the information originally conveyed visually and added in the “post-production process” (Braun, 2011, p. 646) to increase audience reception. Over the last decades, there has been a great challenge in providing AD around the world. This narrative technique aims at accessibility as well (Giovanni, 2024) and facilitates the audience to enjoy the audiovisual products, and it brings about greater satisfaction, especially for those suffering from visual impairments, as its main audience group, to perceive and enjoy the visual content. However, it should be noted that the beneficiaries of this creative art are not limited to blind and partially sighted people (Khoshsaligheh, Shokoozmand, et al., 2022). The field of AD has been less investigated in comparison with other audiovisual subfields such as SDH, but with respect to the main audience group of AD, its urgency also must be taken into consideration.

Since the AD is supposed not to overlap with dialogues, relevant music tracks, and non-semantically meaningful pauses, ‘time constraint’ is one of the major challenges in audio describing films, and it is sometimes impossible to describe the essential details of the images (Giovanni, 2024; Matamala & Villegas, 2016; Núñez, 2015). As depicted by Giovanni (2024), the audio describer should prioritize the information, “giving it a linear sequence in the form of a written text that is nonetheless not free, but constrained by the time available” (p. 309).

Because the end users of AD vary in age, gender, and background knowledge, the presence of culture-bound elements in the films and the necessity of finding the appropriate way to deal with them cannot be ignored.

2.2. Communicating Culture-Bound Elements

Culture-bound elements, also known as ‘culturemes’, can be defined as “formalized, socially and juridically embedded phenomena that exist in a particular form or function in only one of the two cultures being compared” (Baker & Saldanha, 2009, p. 71). Every language has words denoting concepts and things that another language has not considered worth mentioning or that are absent from the way of life or the traditions of the other nation.

As time passes and new scientific domains emerge, the need for knowledge transfer and the desire for acquaintance with different cultures increase. The culture of each community and its cultural elements

may be unknown to other communities (Hatim & Mason, 2014) or depict different meanings or concepts in the target readers' mind and bring up the difficulty in getting the message of the source text (ST) (Leemets, 1992). Therefore, one of the reasons we investigate the subject matter of the ST is to determine to what extent culture-dependent it is and the extent to which we can navigate the translation of these culturally dependent elements while maintaining the balance between the ST and the resulting target text (TT) produced (Nord, 2006).

Dealing with culture-bound elements has always been a great challenge for both the translators and audio describers, each proposing methods and strategies for rendering these elements into the TT, either by taking care of the ST form and meaning or by prioritizing the TT audience. Depending on the text type, the translator may strive to retain the culture-bound items of the ST and maintain the local color rather than domesticating the text for the target audience. In other words, by strategies, the translator or the audio describer decides whether to replace the element while transferring its meaning or to preserve the meaning through its foreignness (Darwish, 2003).

Whereas the translation strategy of culture-bound elements extensively depends on the ST type and the TT readers, strategies in the AD also depend on the type of film that is audio-described and its audience (Jankowska, 2022). Using the culture-bound elements of the ST in translation and AD and rendering the same textual and visual input into words of different languages depend partly on the cultural competence of the translator (Braçaj, 2015) or the audio describer (Perego, 2012) to decide how much specificity and "foreign flavour" (Walczak & Figiel, 2013, p. 22) is needed not to hurt the readers' or audiences' perception, and to help the immersion of the audience in another culture (Walczak, 2015).

Moreover, the strategies used for the translation of culture-bound elements can be situated on a continuum between domestication and foreignization (Posadas, 2010). In fact, closeness or distance between the SL and the TL determines the strategies (Szarkowska & Jankowska, 2015) and puts more effort into transferring the message since this may affect the accuracy of the text (Braçaj, 2015; Feng, 2016; Pedersen, 2009).

Normally, the translation of culture-bound elements must not be in a way that the end users of the text, of any social or educational level, have problems comprehending them, let alone having problems with the coherency of the message (Morris, 2006). The culture-bound elements were used to convey a specific message; therefore, the translator or audio describer cannot change the message or domesticate it for the sake of end users (Swallow, 2003).

So far, many leading scholars (Gottlieb, 2009; Matamala & Rami, 2009; Pedersen, 2005; Reiss & Rhodes, 2014) in AVT and its subfields have investigated the process of transferring various culture-bound elements. Since the "cross-cultural encounters" either in the translation of texts or in AVT are inevitable, the investigators adopt different strategies for transferring or recreation of these elements. To name a few of these strategies, we can refer to retention (Gottlieb, 2009; Szarkowska & Jankowska, 2015), specification (Pedersen, 2005), explicitation (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2014; Szarkowska & Jankowska, 2015), generalization (Matamala & Rami, 2009), and omission (Ripoll, 2005), etc., which are usually the most applied ones, depending on the text type and the audience. However, we can hardly find any guidelines or recommendations in the subfield of AD for approaching the verbal translation strategies of culture-bound elements (Maszerowska & Mangiron, 2014).

Among the scholars, Pedersen (2005) investigated the translation problem, or crisis point in subtitling. He selected one hundred films and TV programs and their subtitles as a corpus to investigate how the translators use "space-consuming strategies like addition and paraphrase" (p. 14) in "slow dialogue" (p. 14) when there is "ample time and space" (p. 14). In conclusion, Pedersen (2005) claims that the existence of an "unsolvable culture-bound translation problem" (p. 1) is improbable. Minutella (2012) is another scholar who made an investigation analyzing culture-specific references in the Italian translation of three multilingual films. In these films, communication takes place in more than one language, with the aim of investigating how multilingual films, as a portrayal of linguistic and cultural diversity, are translated for an Italian audience. She concluded that the cultural references related to Indian places and traditions are domesticated in the dubbed versions and foreignized for subtitles. Also,

the cultural references related to British and American cultures which are shown in the films are generally omitted or domesticated in both AVT modes.

Moreover, Maszerowska and Mangiron (2014) tackled the issue of culture-bound elements in AD. They carefully analyzed the AD of the film “*Inglorious Bastards*”, including an array of culture-bound elements in its visual and verbal communication channels, and concluded that the strategies of generalization, explicitation, and omission were most employed respectively, for transferring culture-bound elements in AD.

In another research, Ranzato (2013a) investigated the translation of culture-bound elements in Italian dubbing in 187 television fiction programs. Her conclusions indicate that there is a translational behavior in contemporary Italian television, which has its roots in the history of dubbing in Italy. Moreover, it seems that the translators for television in this country frequently adhere to the manipulative and, at times, censoring patterns.

The current article opens with the theoretical framework of the study and moves on to the procedures of data collection and data analysis that were employed to investigate the ADs provided by the Sevina Group for the corpus of this study. Subsequently, the paper provides a detailed analysis of the results, along with a discussion of the results and the conclusion of the study. This study seeks to investigate the solutions used by Sevina Group for the rendition of culture-bound elements in their AD products. The overall objective of this study is to investigate the ADs of Persian-dubbed English language films and to explore the way their culture-bound elements were audio-described for Persian audiences. This investigation will be made by thoroughly analyzing the ADs of the selected films that were offered by Sevina Group for the dubbed version of the selected films and their English culture-bound elements. The classification of rendering strategies for culture-bound elements was borrowed from two model frameworks. One of them is from a study by Szarkowska and Jankowska (2015), which has been carried out in a similar field of study and context. This framework includes the rendering strategies for ethnographic and geographical culture-bound elements. They offered the rendering strategies of naming, explicitation, describing and naming, describing without naming, and a combination of these strategies for geographical references. In dealing with ethnographic references, Szarkowska and Jankowska employed strategies such as retention, specification, generalization, and a combination of these strategies.

In our study, geographical elements refer to the places and settings related to the storyline, which can be considered cultural and need specific descriptions for the Persian audience. Ethnographic culture-bound elements refer to food, clothing, literature, entertainment, sports, and even the currency of the source country.

The other model framework includes the translation solutions that were introduced by Pym (2016) and are applicable to many language pairs. As shown in Table 1, Pym’s typology has three main categories such as copying, expression change, and content change, which are divided into a total of seven subcategories:

Table 1
Pym’s (2016, p. 220) Typology of Solutions

No.	Categories	Solutions
1	Copying	Copying sounds
		Copying words
		Copying morphology
		Copying script
2	Expression change	Copying prosodic features
		Copying structures
		Copying fixed phrases
2	Expression change	Copying text structure
		Perspective change
		Changing sentence focus
2	Expression change	Changing semantic focus
		Changing voice

		Density change	Generalization/specification Explicitation/implicitation Multiple translation Resegmentation
		Compensation	New level of expression New place in text (notes, paratexts)
		Cultural correspondence	Corresponding idioms Corresponding culture-specific items
3	Content change	Text tailoring	Correction/censorship/updating Omission of content Addition of content

In this study, five out of seven translation solutions of Pym’s typology were employed to investigate whether they can be applied to the audio-described culture-bound elements in the corpus of this study. Since the ADs of the selected films might include the culture-bound elements that cannot be labeled as geographic or ethnographic ones, or the audio describer might have rendered them through a different strategy such as substitution or omission, the solutions of copying words (for copying the proper name of the SL culture-bound element), copying structures (for copying the SL structures that represent the specific features of the source culture), density change (for using descriptive words or phrases, or the generic terms), cultural correspondence (for substituting TL culture-bound element instead of SL one), and text tailoring (for adding extra information, omitting the culture-bound element or censoring it) were selected.

As shown in Table 2, the strategies utilized for investigating the geographical and ethnographic references were borrowed from Szarkowska and Jankowska (2015), while the solutions derived from Pym (2016) are classified in the same table for the convenience of the readers:

Table 2
The Classification of Borrowed Strategies and Solutions

Geographical references	Ethnographic references	Other culture-bound elements
Naming	Retention	Copying words
Explicitation	Specification	Copying structures
Describing without naming	Generalization	Density change
Describing and naming	Combination	Cultural correspondence
Combination		Text tailoring

At this point, it should be noted that most of the strategies used by Szarkowska and Jankowska (2015) for transferring geographical and ethnographic references are parallel to the solutions offered by Pym (2016). In a way, the solution of copying words can be the superordinate one and be comprised of the strategies of naming and retention. Moreover, the strategies of explicitation, specification, and generalization would be the subcategories in the solution of density change.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus

This qualitative study was based on a phenomenological research design, aiming to describe an aspect of the emerging phenomenon of AD, and was focused on the culture-bound elements and the strategies used to render them in AD into Persian. The research involved four criterion-selected Persian-dubbed English classic films. The descriptive information of the selected films is shown in Table 3.

Table 3
The Descriptive Information of the Corpus

Film Title	Film Director	Release Date	Time	Country	Audio Describer
<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>	John Ford	1940	129 mins.	USA	Ali Dehkordi
<i>Casablanca</i>	Micheal Curtiz	1942	102 mins.	USA	Sahar Dolatshahi
<i>The Shawshank Redemption</i>	Frank Darabont	1994	142 mins.	USA	Maziar Lorestani
<i>Forest Gump</i>	Robert Zemeckis	1994	142 mins.	USA	Mohammad Bahrani

The sample of this study, based on a purposive strategy, was chosen to be small due to the expected difficulty of obtaining in-depth analysis. The rationale for selecting this corpus was that the classic genre is usually produced for adults; thus, it is more probable to have a variety of culture-bound elements that are related to the storyline and should be transferred to other languages while dubbing, subtitling, and even audio describing.

3.2. Procedure

For data collection, the uncensored Persian-dubbed versions of the selected films were downloaded, and Persian ADs of the selected dubbed films produced by Sevina Group, as archival data, were transcribed by the researchers. Concerning the uncensored version of the films, the researchers aimed to become aware of how many culture-bound elements were totally illustrated in these films and to see whether there was an element that is related to the SL culture but was omitted from its Persian version.

Then, the selected films were watched thoroughly and attentively by the researchers, and all of the scenes were compared to their Persian ADs to follow the scenes that were described and to identify the presence of culture-bound elements in each scene.

The culture-bound elements of the selected films were classified according to Table 4, and the unit of analysis of these elements was words and phrases which were used by the audio describers.

Table 4
The Four Components of the Audiovisual Texts

	Audio	Visual
Verbal	Words heard	Words read
Non-verbal	Music + special effects	The picture Photography


The non-verbal references included in the corpus were also investigated as they illustrate culture-bound elements such as audio-described images on postcards, posters in the street, product labels, TV programs, and so on. The sample of the transcription process for the ADs of the selected films in our study was as follows:

Bozorghahi asphalt, Tam Jad ghadam zanan az entehaye masir pish miayad, dar doordast derakhtha dar atrafe bozorghah dide mishavad. Tam javan, ghadboland va laghar ast. Lebashayash chandan no nist va kolahi parcheyi va labe dar be sar darad. Tam az bozorghah kharej mishavad. Kenarash dar hashiyeye bozorghah yek forooshgahe bozorg va yek kamion dide mishavad. Be samte forooshgah miravad, zan va mard az an kharej mishavand. Zan dasthayash ra be kamar zade, moghabele forooshgah eestade va raftene mard ra tamashad mikonad ...

[*Back Translation:* The asphalt highway, Tom Joad, comes from the end of the path, seen in the distance of trees around the highway. Tom is young, tall, and thin. His clothes are not so new, and he has a hat with cloth and edges. Next to it, on the highway, there is a large store and a truck. It goes to the store, man and wife walk out of it. The woman puts her hands to her waist, stands in front of the store and watches the man go...]

Then, the extracted culture-bound elements of each film were classified in a table so that they could be analyzed and compared with ease. A sample is shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Sample of Classification for Culture-Bound Elements of the Selected Films

Scene	Original Text in AD	Back Translation	Strategy
	Lebashayash chandan nist va kolahi parcheyi va labe dar be sar darad (Niuzboi, dar an zaman kolahe kargaran boode ast)	His clothes are not so new, and he has a cloth hat with a rim on his head (Newsboy, at the time it was the workers' hat)	Ethnographic reference, strategy of Generalization (Density change)

The validity of the data sampling and the researchers' decision-making processes were tested by the information source of the peer review to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. This procedure was adopted to investigate how much the researchers were successful in employing the correct strategy for each culture-bound element. To this end, the researchers prepared a survey form, including a short explanation section on the aim of the study and the strategies that have been extracted from the model frameworks. Then, the researchers added the elements that were recognized as culture-bound, their audio-described strategies, and the related scenes for the peers. In the last part of the survey form, there was a single question about two culture-bound elements and their appropriate strategies in AD. Four peers were asked for cooperation and giving feedback. Their viewpoints about the rendering strategies were discussed separately with each other to come up with an applicable solution. In case of contradiction between the outcome achieved by the researchers and the peers' opinions, the results were updated and modified after the required measurements on the adaptation of the correct strategy. Then, this question was asked whether the words "cravat" and "papillon" (Keravat va Papion) could be considered as culture-bound elements if they were used by the same name in the Persian ADs. The answers of all four peers were positive, and the strategy would be "retention", since it is related to ethnographic references (the type of clothing).

4. Results

4.1. The Grapes of Wrath (Ford, 1940)

In this film, since the main characters are moving from one place to another, the strategy of naming, or the solution of copying words, was mostly used for the name of places, amongst other strategies in its AD; for example, keeping the proper names of Nioyork Siti [*Back translation*: New York City] or Bozorgrahе 66 Amrika [*Back translation*: US Highway 66] in Persian AD.

In the AD of this film, the geographical references were rendered by the strategies of naming (5 times), explicitation (3 times), describing and naming (2 times), and describing without naming (1 time). The ethnographic references were rendered by the strategies of retention (2 times), specification (1 time), and generalization (3 times). Moreover, according to the solutions offered by Pym, one omission of a proper name, which was visually shown in the film, and two additions, as the subcategories of text tailoring, can be seen in the AD of this film. The mentioned additions and omissions are shown in Table 6.

Table 6
The Added Descriptions for the Culture-Bound Elements

Scene	Original Text in AD	Back Translation	Strategy
	<p>Kamion be shahre Oklahoma miresad. Shahri modern va por az aparteman, khiabane asfalt and otomobilha.</p>	<p>The truck arrives in Oklahoma City. A modern city full of apartments, asphalt streets and cars.</p>	<p>Geographical reference, the strategy of Describing and Naming (Text tailoring, addition)</p>
	<p>Sarneshine dovome mashin nimkhiz shode, setareye rooye lebase formash ra mibinim. Ou kalantar ast.</p>	<p>The second passenger on the car is half-ripped, we see the star on his uniform. He's the sheriff.</p>	<p>Ethnographic reference, the strategy of Specification (Density change) (Text tailoring, addition)</p>
	<p>Rooye tablo neveshte shode "Bozorgrah 66 Amrika"</p>	<p>The sign reads "The 66th Highway in America".</p>	<p>Geographical reference, the strategy of Explicitation (Density change) (Text tailoring, omission of the word "Oklahoma")</p>

4.2. Casablanca (Curtiz, 1942)

In this film, there is a scene of the Casablanca market and the port, which illustrates people wearing Arabic and Syrian clothes such as abaya dresses and special types of hats, which could be considered as an ethnographic culture-bound element, but they were omitted in Persian AD. The omitted ethnographic culture-bound element is shown in Table 7.

Regarding the names of places, the audio describer narrates the settings, specifically the cultural ones, that are more related to the plot of the story. Also, for random places, she/he only describes the place without referring to their proper names, for example, dar yek salone raghs [*Back translation*: In a ballroom] or dar yek kafe dar Paris [*Back translation*: In a café in Paris].


Table 7
The Omitted Ethnographic Culture-Bound Element

Scene	Original Text in AD	Back Translation	Strategy
	Mardom dar bazar va bandare Kazabelank a ke ba memarie arabi sakhte shode, dar hale takapoo hastand.	People are struggling in the market and port of Casablanca, built with Arabic architecture	Geographical reference, the strategy of Describing and naming

Moreover, when referring to Paris in this film, the audio describer does not directly refer to “Arch of Triumph” as a visual culture-bound element which is taken as a symbol of Paris (Table 8).

In the AD of this film, the geographical references were rendered by the strategies of naming (3 times), explicitation (3 times), describing and naming (1 time), and describing without naming (3 times). The ethnographic references were rendered by the strategies of retention (2 times), specification (5 times), and generalization (1 time). According to the solutions offered by Pym (2016), one implication of a proper name, which was shown as a visual element in the film can be seen in its AD. Moreover, the audio describer refers to “a bottle of wine” as Nooshidani [*Back translation*: Drink], which can be considered a generalization strategy and even a censorship attitude. The implicit geographical culture-bound element is shown in Table 8.

Table 8
The Implicit Geographical Culture-Bound Element


Scene	Original Text in AD	Back Translation	Strategy
	Rik gozashte ra be yad miavarad. Roozhayi ke ba Elza dar Paris bude.	Rick remembers the past. Days with Elza in Paris.	Geographical reference, the strategy of Describing without naming (Implication)

4.3. The Shawshank Redemption (Darabont, 1994)

In the AD of this film, the geographical references were rendered by the strategies of naming (2 times), explicitation (2 times), describing and naming (0 time), and describing without naming (1 time). The ethnographic references were rendered by the strategies of retention (6 times), specification (7 times), and generalization (1 time).

According to the solutions offered by Pym, the audio describer had used the solution of addition, as a subcategory of text tailoring, for adding extra information about a game چکەرژ یەک بازیکه که با موهره‌های تاکته نارد و رو‌ی سافه‌ی شاترانج یا پشته تاکته نارد بازی می‌کنند [*Back translation*: Checkers is a game played with backgammon pieces and on a chessboard or behind backgammon], along with one omission, as the subcategory of text tailoring, of referring to the proper name of a geographical place which was shown as a visual element in the film. Table 9 illustrates the added extra information for an ethnographic culture-bound element and the omitted geographical culture-bound one.

Table 9
The Added Extra Information and the Omitted Culture-Bound Element

Scene	Original Text in AD	Back Translation	Strategy
	Andy va Red neshasteand and darand chekerz bazi mikonand. Chekerz yek bazist ke ba mohrehay takhte nard va rooye safheye shatranj ya poshte takhte nard bazi mikonand.	Andy and Red are sitting down and playing checkers. Checkers are a game played with backgammon pieces on a chessboard or behind a backgammon board.	Ethnographic reference, the strategy of Retention (Copying words) (Text tailoring, addition)
	Yek otobouse sefid be samte voroudie زندان میراود (Dar in ghesmat az film, tasviri az zendane sha'shank dar namaye baz namayesh dade mishavad amma dar tosefe shafahi be an eshareyi nashode ast.)	A white bus goes to the entrance to the prison (In this part of the film, a picture of Shawns Shank Prison is displayed in the open view)	Geographical reference, the strategy of Describing without naming (Text Tailoring, omission)


4.4. Forest Gump (Zemeckis, 1994)

In the AD of this film, the geographical references were rendered by the strategies of naming (4 times), explicitation (1 time), describing and naming (2 times), and describing without naming (1 time). The ethnographic references were rendered by the strategies of retention (4 times) and specification (7 times).

To refer to the proper names of the places which are bound to the country in which the film was produced and the storyline would be followed by the audience by these proper names, the audio describer had mentioned the name of that place, mostly along with a short descriptive word or phrase (explicitation). For instance, the audio describer mentions the names “Vietnam” or “America” without any related textual reference on the screen, and only the visual elements of the film refer to these places.

In another scene, the audio describer refused to mention the proper name of the place and used the descriptive phrase of Khiabane kenare Kakhe Sefid [*Back translation*: The street next to the White House] instead of its proper name of Pennsylvania Avenue. Table 10 illustrates the audio-described part of Khiabane kenare Kakhe Sefid [*Back translation*: The street next to the White House] instead of using its proper name.

Table 10
The Description Instead of the Proper Name of a Geographical Culture-Bound Element

Scene	Original Text in AD	Back Translation	Strategy
	Khiabane		
	kenare	Street next	
	Kakhe	to the White	
	Sefid.	House. The	Geographical
	Mardom	people of	reference,
	sham' be	the candle	the strategy
	dast az anja	go through	of
	migozarand.	there.	Describing
	Forest va	Forrest and	without
	Jeni kenare	Jenny walk	naming
anha	next to		
ghadam	them.		
mizanand.			

To sum up, it can be concluded that the audio describers of Sevina Group have applied a variety of rendering strategies and solutions once they confronted geographical, ethnographic, and other culture-bound elements. Moreover, the audio describers of this group have rendered a total of 76 culture-bound elements in the four selected films (except two omitted ones). Subsequently, the numeric outcome of rendering strategies for geographical and ethnographic references will be illustrated in Table 11 and Table 12.

Table 11
The Numeric Outcome of Analysis for Geographical References

Film	Geographical References				Combination
	Naming (Copying words)	Explication (Density change)	Describing and naming	Describing without naming	
The Grapes of Wrath	5	3	2	1	--
Casablanca	3	3	1	3	--
The Shawshank Redemption	2	2	0	1	--
Forest Gump	4	1	2	1	--
Total	14	9	5	6	--

Table 12
The Numeric Outcome of Analysis for Ethnographic References

Film	Ethnographic References			Combination
	Retention (Copying words)	Specification (Density change)	Generalization (Density change)	
The Grapes of Wrath	2	1	3	--
Casablanca	2	5	1	--

The Shawshank Redemption	6	7	1	--
Forest Gump	4	7	--	--
Total	14	20	5	--

As can be seen in Figures 1 and 2, some of the rendering strategies for geographical and ethnographic references have a higher frequency of usage by this group.

Figure 1
Frequency of Rendering Strategies for Geographical References

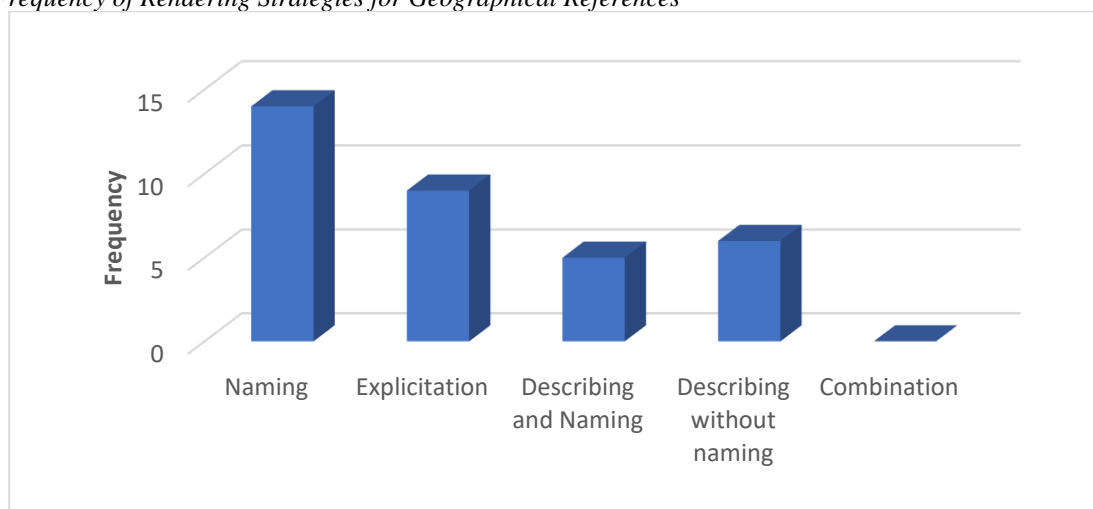
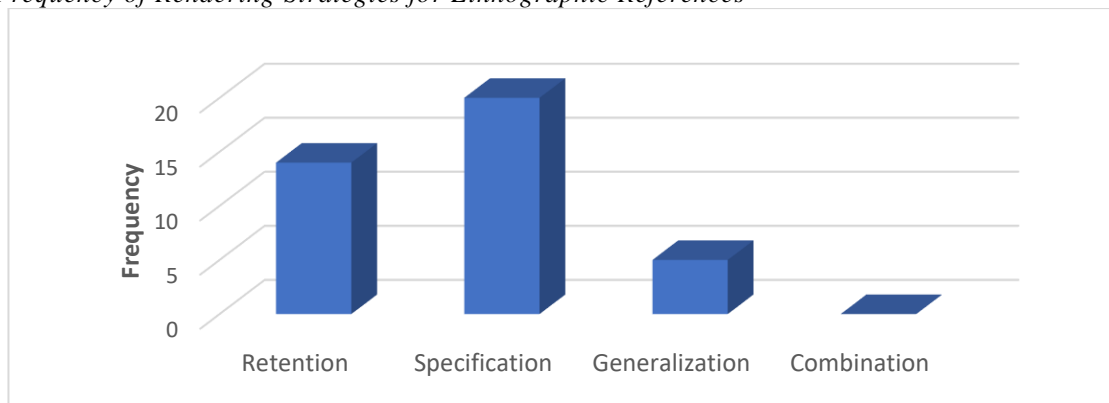


Figure 2
Frequency of Rendering Strategies for Ethnographic References



In the following, the numeric outcome of Pym’s solutions for the culture-bound elements of these films will be illustrated in Table 15.

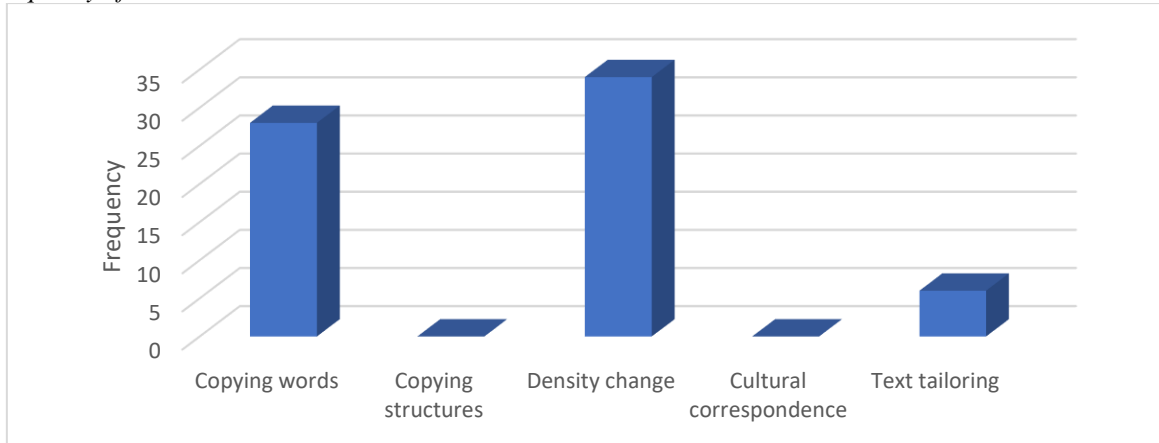
Table 13
The Numeric Outcome of Pym’s Solutions

Film	Solutions				
	Copying words	Copying structures	Density change	Cultural correspondence	Text tailoring
<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>	7	0	7	0	2 (Addition) 1 (Omission)
<i>Casablanca</i>	5	0	9	0	1 (Censorship)

<i>The Shawshank Redemption</i>	8	0	10	0	1 (Addition) 1 (Omission)
<i>Forest Gump</i>	8	0	8	0	
Total	28	0	34	0	6

As can be seen in Table 13, some of the solutions have a higher frequency of usage by this group.

Figure 3
Frequency of Translation Solutions



The frequency of these solutions is illustrated and compared in Figure 3. It can be claimed that the audio describers of the Sevina group mostly preferred to use the types of rendering strategies that provide the audience with the proper names of the culture-bound elements, accompanied by a descriptive word or phrase to help the audience’s perception in following the storyline and experiencing the foreign flavor of the films. Figures 4 and 5 depict the frequency of most applied rendering strategies and solutions in the ADs of the selected films.

Figure 4
Distribution of Szarkowska and Jankowska’s Rendition Strategies

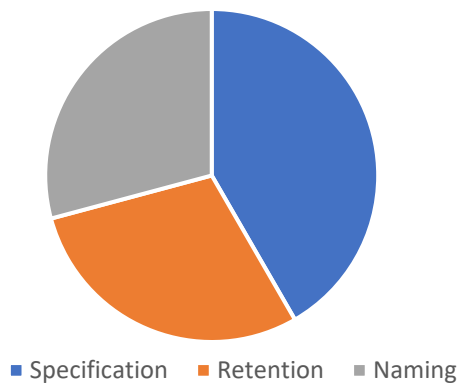
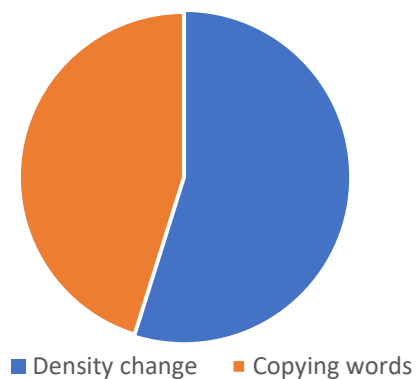


Figure 5
Distribution of Pym’s Translation Solutions



5. Discussion

This study addresses culture-bound elements, one of the most controversial issues in translation across different languages due to their distinct cultural lexis and structures. Integrating communication and technology also focuses on AD, a relatively unexplored domain, especially within the context of Iran. Hence, this research contributes valuable insight into how the audio describers utilize communication and technology to deal with the culture-bound elements that have been left less explored in the context

of Persian AD. The findings can help improve AD practices in other settings, leveraging the advancements in communication and technology for improved accessibility and cultural relevance.

In general, it should be accepted that the presence of culture-bound elements is inevitable in audiovisual products, as it is in texts that were written in different languages. These elements also bring the SL culture in touch with the target audience in translation and help flourish their imagination to better understand the message that was aimed to be conveyed through this process in another language.

Basically, by transferring English culture-bound elements into Persian AD, the target audience would communicate with the film, which is produced in a culture other than their own, even without having particular background knowledge of the subject matter of the film (Szarkowska & Jankowska, 2015). This claim is also in line with the strategies most commonly employed by the audio describers of Sevina Group. When the viewers watch an audiovisual product, they interpret and understand it in their own way (Giovanni, 2024), which may be, to a certain extent, far from the theme and intent of the producer, and this fact also may even hold true more strongly for the target audience of the product. To help with this, the target audiences could use some kind of assistance like “cross-cultural comprehension” (Kiaer & Kim, 2021. p. 231) to merge into the cultural elements and boost their perception of the aim of the filmmaker.

Regarding the ideological aspect of transferring SL culture-bound elements, sometimes they conflict with regular ideological norms in the target language. In such cases, the contradictory ideological elements will be screened and excluded by censorship to avoid any kind of invasion from the SL ideologies (Li & Yi, 2023; Ranzato, 2015), which Gambier (2019) condemns as the translation has become “a tool of the protectionist use of culture, erasing traces of the foreign voice” (p. 63).

As an example, we can refer to the elements in the corpus of this study that are against Persian regular ideological norms, but they were audio described by Sevina Group, namely Kazino [*Back translation*: Casino], Disko [*Back translation*: Disco], or Majalleye Peleiboi [*Back translation*: Playboy magazine]. However, it should be remembered that all four selected films are for adults who are mostly familiar with these types of culture-bound elements. One of the reasons that these elements were preserved could be due to their pivotal role in the storyline, and they might have been omitted in other genres or for another age group of the audience.

Moreover, along with the findings of Ranzato (2013b) that the translators for Italian television often seem to follow the manipulative and sometimes censoring pattern in dubbing for sensitive content, the audio describers of Sevina Group might have also used the strategy of generalization for some of the culture-bound elements in AD, namely the usage of Nooshidani [*Back translation*: Drink] instead of Shisheye Mashroob [*Back translation*: Liquor glass] in the film “*Casablanca*”.

With reference to the solution of cultural correspondence, one of the subcategories which was offered by Pym (2016) in the model framework of this study, this solution could be considered as a way for the audio describers to domesticate the culture-bound element of the source language. By this, the audio describer chooses a corresponding equivalent from the TL cultural elements to replace the SL cultural element and to transfer only the meaning of that element to the target audience. Regarding the ADs of the selected films in this study, the audio describers of Sevina Group have decided not to apply the strategy of cultural correspondence for any of the English culture-bound elements and preferred to use them as they are in the SL for the Persian audience. It might be because the corresponding equivalent may evoke a weaker connotation in comparison with the original one. Although using similar but simpler equivalents has been welcomed by many scholars (Wierzbicka, 1992).

According to the findings of this study, we can claim that the factor of ‘time constraint’ should not be ignored in analyzing the strategies and solutions that were used by the audio describers since this factor affects the type of strategy that the audio describer can use to not to overlap the dialogues, relevant music tracks and non-semantically meaningful pauses. The factor of time constraint was also analyzed by Matamala and Rami (2009) in AD, who employed applicable rendering strategies such as generalization to cope with this factor. Hence, most of the strategies that were applied for rendering English culture-bound elements by the audio describers of Sevina Group are among the ones that are

limited to the name of the element, which, in some cases, is accompanied by a descriptive word or phrase, to occupy less space in the ADs. By choosing these rendering strategies, more details of the visual elements could be added.

However, on the one hand, the needs and expectations of other intended users of this narrative technique should not be overlooked. These users include learners who use the AD for language acquisition and immigrants who benefit from this technique to become familiar with the culture of the host country (Khoshsaligheh, Shokoozmand, et al., 2022; Varela, 1999). On the other hand, because Persian and English languages have many words in common and are not considered distant ones, the rendering strategies are limited to the name of the culture-bound element or accompanying short descriptive words or phrases that are deemed appropriate. This is primarily due to the familiarity of these elements for the Persian audience.

Opposing the findings of Minutella (2012) in dubbing and subtitling that the cultural references related to British and American cultures that are shown in the films are generally omitted or domesticated, the audio describers of Sevina Group have adopted the foreignization attitude in the rendition of English culture-bound elements. Also, they added descriptive words, phrases, and even sentences (namely, the explanation for the game of checkers) whenever it was possible to help the audience's perception.

Non-verbal references were included in the corpus as they illustrate a culture-bound element, such as audio-described images on postcards, posters on the street, product labels, TV programs, and so on. Concerning these non-verbal visual elements, we can mention the name of the Watergate Hotel in "*Forest Gump*", which was shown on a card, and the Statue of Liberty on the postcard in "*The Grapes of Wrath*", which are better to be audio-described for the blind and partially sighted audience to improve their perception of the film. The audio describers of Sevina Group have adopted the attitude of prioritization toward these on-screen culture-bound elements since they convey meanings to help the audience make sense of the film (Matamala, 2014).

As stated earlier in the findings of this study, the strategy of specification was the most applied one (total of 20 cases), which can be considered equal to the strategy of explicitation in the study conducted by Maszerowska and Mangiron (2014). This strategy was one of the most employed ones as well in their study for transferring culture-bound elements by AD.

The audio describers of Sevina Group mostly employed descriptive strategies for the rendition of culture-bound elements in the selected films. They might have selected such strategies to properly verbalize the way the culture-bound elements were shown in the films, to convey their specific cultural message. The importance of conveying the cultural message was also asserted by Wilken and Kruger (2016), stating that every picture of the film and the way it was shown is important in creating specific meanings for the audience.

The strategy of naming or retention is also the most applied strategy by the audio describers of Sevina Group, through which the name of the culture-bound element was kept for the target audience. These strategies might be used to provoke a similar reaction in the Persian audience and to help the blind and partially sighted audience not feel detached from the storyline of the film, produced in a language and a country other than their own. Using the names of famous places such as the White House, St. Louis, or the Statue of Liberty for Persian audiences, to less famous places such as Buxton without any accompanying descriptive word or phrase, or the Colorado River that might be totally unknown for them, can be considered as both a strong and weak point in the ADs produced by Sevina Group. It can be strong when it helps the Persian audience to become acquainted with the source language's geographical references or when it increases the background knowledge of the target audience. On the other hand, it can be inferred as weak when they distract the attention of the blind and partially sighted audience, as the main audience group of this narrative technique, especially the older ones, since these geographical references might not be directly related to the storyline.

In conclusion, these results may not be applicable to the assessment of Persian audiences' perception of culture-bound elements while using an audio-described product. Therefore, more research on the reception of culture-bound elements and the way audio describers render them in the context of Iran is

highly recommended, based on which future practice can meet the wants of the intended users. The reception study should include the perspectives of the blind and partially sighted audience. Such a finding can be derived from data that has access to cultural allusions, which are expected to increase the level of immersion of the audience. Additionally, it can be claimed with caution that the audio describers of this group have observed a form of consistency in the strategies used for the rendition of culture-bound elements (Ramière, 2006), and in AD, the untranslatability of culture-bound elements can be minimized if addressed precisely (Rahmawati, 2018).

The purpose of the current study was to assess how the audio describers of Sevina Group have rendered English culture-bound elements for the Persian audience, the elements that might be unknown for most of the target blind and partially sighted audience. It is now likely to conclude that the rendering strategies of specification, retention, and naming, which are parallel to the solutions of copying words and density change, are the most applied ones by Sevina Group. These findings suggest that regarding the constraints of AD production and the needs of the audience groups for perception and following the storyline, using a rendering strategy that is composed of the name of the culture-bound element with a short descriptive word or phrase is the most practically useful one. This approach ensures enhanced accessibility and comprehension for visually impaired audiences, further highlighting the role of communication and technology in advancing audio description practices.

To some extent, this research extends our knowledge of the way English culture-bound elements are dealt with in the ADs produced by Sevina Group, an Iranian non-governmental pioneer in the field of AD. Leveraging communication and technology, the current findings add to a growing body of literature in the subfield of AD within the context of Iran, although the scope of this study is limited in terms of the specific genre of the selected films and the generalizability of the results is subject to certain limitations and need to be interpreted cautiously. However, many other genres remain as new avenues for further in-depth investigation. Moreover, it must be claimed that the scale of using the culture-bound elements and their appropriate strategies in each genre is still ambiguous and undetermined in the Persian AD of English-language films and is recommended for further research in this domain. It hopes that AD, which is probably the most ignored AVT modality within the context of Iran, will be given advancements, especially on national television, which has not taken any measure in this regard at all. Integration of communication and technology can facilitate the advancement of audio description practices, ensuring greater accessibility and inclusivity for visually impaired audiences in Iran and beyond. On a final note, having access to AD technology is one of the high-priority measurements that need to be provided for blind and partially sighted people, believing that technology can promote communication, equity, and accessibility.

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Filmography

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