

Error Patterns in Persian Amateur Subtitles and the Limits of the FAR Model

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Abstract Translation quality is crucial for effective communication, and in subtitling its importance is heightened by the medium's unique constraints. Amateur subtitling has emerged as a growing form of intercultural communication and an area of increasing academic interest. This study investigates amateur subtitling of foreign drama feature films localized for Persian-language audiences in Iran based on the FAR model proposed by Pedersen (2017a). This study focuses on assessing the quality of amateur subtitles with the aim of uncovering the error patterns of audiovisual translation (AVT) by amateur subtitlers. According to the identified error patterns, semantic errors are the most significant factor from a translational perspective. While amateur subtitlers may manifest deficiencies and errors in semantic aspects, they also demonstrate notable competencies, particularly in their technical proficiency with subtitling software. Drawing on the results, the article argues for context-sensitive refinements to the FAR model to account for cultural variables that shape subtitling practices, highlighting the influence of local norms and constraints.

Keywords: *Non-professional Subtitling, Translation Quality, Far Model, Persian*

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, thanks to technological advancements and related industries, and the corresponding easy access to software, the participation of audiences with their unique perspective and public release in the realm of media production has emerged as a new phenomenon. These participants have become integral to media culture and identity constituents, engaging in various activities such as translation, dubbing, subtitling, and other endeavors. The exclusive broadcasting of films and series, particularly Japanese anime, as the starting point within various countries, along with the demands of fans for up-to-date access to media products upon release (Díaz-Cintas & Sánchez, 2006), are some of the main reasons behind this emergence. Consequently, amateur media enthusiasts have emerged, each of whom is dedicated to a different subfield in audiovisual translation (AVT). As Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2014) state, the inception of amateur subtitling dates back to the 1980s, when it emerged as an attempt to popularize Japanese cartoons known as *manga* and *anime*, driven by both language barriers and the scant distribution of the audience's favorite films and TV series as two crucial factors that urged fans to proceed to translate and subtitle the films and series themselves. Throughout the years, this new form of subtitling, known as "by fans for fans" (Díaz-Cintas and Remael, 2014, p. 27), has expanded its reach and challenged the exclusivity of professional subtitling companies. Amateur subtitling is conducted by individuals or groups without any official organization or financial motivation. These volunteer translators not only popularized media products but also contributed to the enrichment of media cultures. Consequently, it has received great welcome from both audiences and communities and has garnered academic attention. This research explores amateur subtitling by focusing on different types of errors such as semantic and technical errors and seeks to determine the error pattern in such translations. This study set out to explore two central lines of inquiry. First, it aimed to determine the predominant technical features that characterize Persian amateur subtitles created for English-language drama films. Second, it sought to examine and classify the recurring error patterns that emerge in these subtitles. To achieve this, the investigation employed a model proposed by Pedersen (2017a). The

films selected for this study belong to a specific genre to obtain more precise results, as different types of texts and speeches require different styles and methods of translation.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1. Translation quality assessment

Reception studies in media accessibility highlight that audience comprehension is shaped by intercultural and ideological factors extending well beyond technical accuracy ([Shokoohmand & Khoshsaligheh, 2024](#)). Audiovisual translation practices are further complicated by pervasive censorship and the systematic manipulation of culturally sensitive content ([Abu-Rayyash & Shiyab, 2023](#); [Fouladi & Hashemi, 2025](#)), which, when compounded by challenges in adapting intercultural nuances and taboo items for targeted audiences, produce distinctive error patterns that standardized assessment models fail to adequately capture.

Assessing a product's quality is a multifaceted phenomenon subject to various interpretations depending on the chosen approach, as observed by [Pedersen \(2017a\)](#). This conceptual complexity has engendered scholarly effort across diverse disciplines to delineate the concept of quality. Within the domain of Translation Studies, this challenge is particularly pronounced due to the inherent subjectivity involved in quality assessment, which is influenced by individual perspectives and subjective judgments. Despite the inherent challenges of reconciling subjective judgments with scientific objectivity, it remains imperative to acknowledge the significance of research in this field, as asserted by [House \(2001\)](#).

A substantial body of research on the Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) has provided practical insights ([Doherty, 2017](#); [Doherty et al., 2013](#); [Pym 2020](#)). Internationally recognized standards, exemplified by [ISO EN 17100 \(2015\)](#) and [EN 15038 \(2006\)](#), delineate the competencies and attributes expected of professionals engaged in translation processes, encompassing translators, reviewers, terminologists, and managers. These professionals play a pivotal role in ensuring translation quality and nurturing robust supplier-client relationships ([Szarkowska et al., 2020](#)). Additionally, deductive assessment models, involving the quantification of errors and the

imposition of penalties commensurate with error severity, find common applications, particularly within the realms of localization and information technology (Doherty, 2017; O'Brien, 2012).

In the academic context, TQA predominantly adopts a communicative perspective with a central emphasis on issues related to equivalence. Translation quality is typically assessed using three primary models: response-based, text-based, and functional-pragmatic approaches (Szarkowska et al., 2020). Response-based approaches prioritize the evaluation of equivalence between translations and their source texts (ST) based on responses elicited from their respective target audiences. This approach seeks to ascertain whether the response provoked by translation aligns with that elicited by the original work. Text-based approaches, grounded in linguistic principles, underscore the comparative analysis of ST and target texts (TT) to discern the principal strategies employed by translators in terms of syntactic, stylistic, and semantic alterations. Finally, the functional-pragmatic approach assesses translation quality by considering the pragmatic aspects of language use. Centers on Skopos or the purpose of the translation. In this context, equivalence pivots in the presence of a TT function equivalent to that of ST. The latest iteration finds application in AVT, particularly subtitling assessments (Abdelaal, 2019).

Within AVT, subtitling has become a central object of research. As a practice that involves condensing spoken language into synchronized, written on-screen text, subtitling demands a balance between semantic fidelity and readability. Technical constraints such as line length, character-per-second limits, punctuation, and segmentation further complicate the subtitler's task (Gottlieb, 2005). These challenges make AVT a unique field in which linguistic and technical competencies intersect—and where quality assessment must extend beyond traditional linguistic criteria.

2.2. Amateur subtitling: Global trends and the Iranian context

The term non-professional interpreting and translation (NPIT) broadly refers to translational practices carried out by individuals without formal training, institutional affiliation, or professional certification (Antonini et al., 2017). This inclusive label contrasts with narrower or value-laden alternatives like

“unprofessional” or “natural translation”. Within the field of AVT, NPIT plays a critical role in widening access to subtitled media, particularly in under-resourced contexts. These practitioners are often circumstantial bilinguals ([Angelelli, 2010](#)) whose informal efforts, though outside professional norms, serve functional social purposes ([Hall & Sham, 2007](#)).

In many global contexts, amateur subtitling is largely associated with fansubbing, a grassroots practice that originated in Japanese anime communities and is defined as subtitling “by fans for fans” ([Díaz-Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006](#); [Pérez-González, 2017](#)). However, the scope has since broadened to include funsubbing, blogger subtitling, danmaku (the practice in which online viewers provide amateur translations of foreign-language videos by posting live on-screen comments), and self-subtitling, practices now seen as part of a wider participatory culture ([O’Hagan, 2017](#); [Wang et al., 2024](#)). These subtitlers often deviate from industry norms, using translation as a tool for cultural mediation, ideological commentary, or audience engagement ([Nornes, 2007](#); [Pérez-González, 2012](#)).

The boundary between amateur and professional subtitling is increasingly fluid. Some large fansub communities, such as aRGENTeam¹, implement structured hierarchies, training systems, and recruitment tests ([Orrego-Carmona, 2016](#)), while others have seen members transition into professional roles ([Casarini, 2014](#)). Conversely, professionals have adopted stylistic features from fansubbing, including parody subtitles and on-screen performative texts ([Pérez-González, 2014](#); [Díaz-Cintas, 2018](#)). As [Leksawat \(2022\)](#) observes, fansubbing has evolved into a quasi-professional space, especially in language markets underserved by professional AVT. Meanwhile, studies such as [Sajna \(2013\)](#) and point to common amateur errors—semantic, syntactic, or cultural—but also note that many subtitlers use the practice as informal training or for personal enjoyment.

In Iran, the categorization of non-professional subtitling is more differentiated. [Ameri and Khoshsaligheh \(2019\)](#) propose five distinct types of non-professional subtitling: (1) amateur subtitling, (2) fansubbing, (3) funsubtitling, (4) activist subtitling, and (5) commission-oriented subtitling

¹. An Argentine fansub group known for producing and hosting Spanish-language subtitles of movies and TV series, translated and synced by its members

(e.g., TED Talks). While all exist outside formal AVT institutions, they differ in motivation, quality, and distribution channels. Amateur subtitling is the most prevalent and semi-commercial form in Iran. Practitioners, often students or self-taught language learners with technical skills, translate films for pirated websites or local VOD platforms, typically receiving some form of payment. Though lacking systematic training, they are motivated by career-building or freelance opportunities rather than fan loyalty. Their output is more regulated than fansubbing but lacks professional consistency ([Ameri & Khoshsaligheh, 2019](#)). Viewers nonetheless accept these subtitles for their speed and accessibility ([Khoshsaligheh et al., 2019](#); [Ameri, 2020](#)). In contrast, fansubbing in Iran is voluntary and genre-driven, often centered on anime or stand-up comedy ([Khoshsaligheh & Fazeli Haghpanah, 2016](#)). Funsubtitling offers humorous or fake subtitles, usually for satire, and is common on platforms like Aparat and Telegram ([Chaume, 2020](#); [Díaz-Cintas, 2018](#)). Activist subtitling is used to disseminate political content and mobilize civic engagement ([Baker, 2019](#); [Chaume, 2019](#)). Commission-oriented subtitling, as on TEDTalks, involves unpaid yet monitored translation under crowd-sourced models ([O'Hagan, 2020](#); [Jiménez-Crespo, 2017](#)).

This study focuses specifically on amateur subtitling in Iran, excluding fansubbers and other non-professional categories. Unlike fansubbers, Iranian amateur subtitlers do not form collaborative communities or subtitle for fandom-based motives. Rather, they translate across genres, including drama, romance, and thriller for broader, often commercial reasons. This distinction is crucial for evaluating translation quality in a segment of AVT that is expanding yet remains largely unregulated.

2.3. The FAR Model

[Pedersen \(2017a\)](#) states that TQA in a professional society is an adjustment between input and efficiency, ultimately culminating indirectly in the translator's competence. As he points out, quality is not precisely defined and remains vague; thus, most judgments are based on the daily pinpointed characteristics of quality assessment. The FAR model is product-oriented. [Pedersen \(2017b\)](#) argued that a product-oriented model can work more efficiently than a process-oriented model (which mainly focuses on the

process of translation, such as the level of translators' competence and the revision manner of translation). However, he found that most executors used a process-oriented model along with in-house guidelines, which mainly controlled quality assessment.

The letters in the FAR model represent the tripartite domains evaluated by the model, each of which contains subcategories to classify the problems found precisely. The initial phase evaluated the functional equivalence of the subtitles (semantic and stylistic issues). The subsequent phase, acceptability, pertains to the target-language process; its purpose is to check the acceptability of the text in the target language and its adherence to norms. It is divided into three subdivisions of errors related to grammar, spelling, and idiomaticity that involve the natural use of language. The final phase, readability, relates to the technical aspects of subtitling and includes segmentation and spotting, punctuation and graphics, reading speed, and line length (Pedersen, 2017a).

The FAR model is based on error analysis, which is the most common method for TQA (Nord, 1997). This model has specific rules and methods for detecting errors and is sufficiently flexible to incorporate local guidelines and norms. The model borrows labels and scores from NER (Number of words in live subtitles, Edition error, and Recognition error), a model used for assessing live subtitles on television. This model uses a formula for all characters to determine the results (Romero-Fresco, 2012). The FAR model's errors (Table 1) were rated as 'minor', 'standard', or 'serious' (Pedersen, 2017a). In addition to the level of errors, there is a penalty point system based on the impact of an error on audiences, ranging from 0.25 to 2.

Table 1. The FAR Model, subtitling quality assessment model

Area		Types of Errors	Penalty Points
Subtitling Quality Assessment	Functional Equivalence	<i>Semantic Error</i>	Minor (0.5)
			Standard (1)
			Serious (2)
		<i>Stylistic Error</i>	Minor (0.25)
			Standard (0.5)
			Serious (1)
	Acceptability	<i>Grammar Error</i>	Minor (0.25)
			Standard (0.5)
			Serious (1)

Readability	<i>Spelling Error</i>	Minor (0.25)
		Standard (0.5)
		Serious (1)
	<i>Idiomatycity Error</i>	Minor (0.25)
		Standard (0.5)
		Serious (1)
	<i>Segmentation and spotting</i>	Minor (0.25)
		Standard (0.5)
		Serious (1)
	<i>Punctuation and Graphics</i>	Minor (0.25)
		Standard (0.5)
		Serious (1)
	<i>Reading Speed and Line Length</i>	Minor (0.25)
		Standard (0.5)
		Serious (1)

Thus, minor errors could be neglected (deducting 0.25/0.5 points). Minor errors were lexical errors, including terminology errors that did not affect the storyline of the films. Standard errors affect the relationship between the subtitlers and viewers, which [Pedersen \(2007, p. 40\)](#) called “contact of illusion”. The contact of illusion is a metaphor (deducting 0.5/ 1 point), and [Pedersen \(2007\)](#) described the relationship between subtitles and end users. Although viewers know that they are reading translated lines, which may not be precise, they pretend that subtitles are dialogue. Thus, standard errors affect this perception. Standard errors included cases in which utterances important to the storyline were translated differently or eliminated. Finally, serious errors are those that affect the understanding of subtitles and their coherence, which may provide misinformation or irrelevant information, leading the viewer to reread the subtitles (deducting 1/ 2 points) ([Pedersen 2017b](#)). Serious errors consisted of erroneous subtitles that disturbed target viewers’ understanding of the films.

Some advantages of this model can be counted as follows: it is propounded for interlingual translation subtitling, contrary to the existing NER model, which is for intralingual and live subtitling. Additionally, the FAR model is proposed specifically for assessing the quality of subtitles; it is not strict and can be adapted to local norms and values. Despite its advantages, this model is partially flawed, a fact that was also acknowledged by Pederson. The greatest weakness of the model lies in the subjectivity

involved in judging the equivalences and idiomaticity, as well as in determining their penalty scores.

3. Method

The corpus of this study comprises five feature films from the drama genre, along with their amateur Persian subtitles available online and presented by *Tiny Movies*. The *Tiny Movies* is a prominent platform within the Persian mediascape, providing amateur subtitling for various English-language films, thus catering to Iranian audiences seeking accessible, subtitled international content. The films used in this study were selected through purposive sampling, with emphasis on the drama genre. The choice to focus on drama aligns with the genre's narrative complexity, which frequently presents a range of cultural, emotional, and social issues, thus making it an ideal lens for examining translation challenges in subtitling. The nuanced storytelling of this genre is crucial for assessing how amateur subtitlers convey subtle meanings in Persian. In this study, these feature films were selected for investigation and analysis in terms of their quality assessment based on the FAR model proposed by [Pedersen \(2017a\)](#). The descriptive information of the films is presented in [Table 2](#) and was selected through a purposeful sampling procedure. Potentially sensitive themes, such as sexuality, drug use, and explicit language, were consciously included to evaluate subtitlers' handling of culturally challenging content within the Persian context, a setting where such topics are often subject to strict regulatory constraints. Although generalizability to other genres may be limited, the selection aims to offer insight into the specific difficulties amateur subtitlers face when navigating ideologically loaded materials, highlighting potential areas for improvement in training and quality standards. The decision to focus on amateur subtitling rather than other non-professional forms, such as fansubbing or activist subtitling, was based on its dominance and relevance in the Persian mediascape. This study was conducted to identify the following research questions:

1. What are the predominant technical characteristics of Persian amateur subtitles produced for English-language drama films?

2. What error patterns can be identified in the Persian amateur subtitling of English-language drama films?

Accordingly, the objectives are to identify error patterns using the FAR model, evaluate the transferable subtitling skills exhibited by amateur subtitlers, and reflect on the applicability and limitations of the FAR model in non-Western AVT contexts, providing pedagogical implications for subtitler training programs.

In response to the research questions regarding the error patterns of translation quality and format of Persian amateur subtitles for English language drama films, subtitles were extracted from freely accessible subtitle files available on *Tiny Movies*. Each subtitle line was analyzed using the FAR model, which classifies errors into three overarching domains: functional equivalence (semantic and stylistic errors), acceptability (grammar, spelling, and idiomaticity), and readability (spotting, segmentation, punctuation, line length, and reading speed). Errors were assessed against the corresponding ST. Each instance was assigned a severity score, minor, standard, or serious, according to [Pedersen's \(2017a\)](#) guidelines, with corresponding penalty values ranging from 0.25 to 2 points. By nature, this research is descriptive and attempts to identify the most frequent errors made by amateur subtitlers.

Table 2. The descriptive information corpus of the study based on IMDb

Film Title	Country	Year	Genre	Director	Languages
<i>The Danish Girl</i>	United Kingdom/ United States	2015	Drama/ Biography/ Crime	Tom Hooper	English/ French/ German/ Ukrainian
<i>American Honey</i>	United Kingdom/ United States	2016	Drama/ Adventure/ Romance	Andrea Arnold	English
<i>Manchester by the Sea</i>	United States	2016	Drama	Kenneth Lonergan	English
<i>Moonlight</i>	United States	2016	Drama	Barry Jenkins	English
<i>Misconduct</i>	United States	2016	Drama/ Mystery/ Thriller	Shintaro Shimosava	English

4. Results

This section presents the analysis of errors identified in the selected corpus of five English-language drama films subtitled into Persian by amateur subtitlers. Using the FAR model (Pedersen, 2017a), three major categories, Functional Equivalence, Acceptability, and Readability, were examined in depth. The examples provided are transcribed directly from the subtitles as displayed on screen, preserving formatting, punctuation, and other stylistic features in order to reflect the authentic viewer experience.

4.1. Functional equivalence

The first dimension of the FAR model evaluates semantic and stylistic fidelity between the ST and TT. Functional Equivalence pertains to whether the intended meaning of the source utterance is accurately conveyed in the subtitle, and whether the style and tone are consistent with the communicative context.

4.1.1. Semantic error

Semantic errors refer to mistranslations that distort or misrepresent the source meaning. According to Pedersen (2017a), these errors can significantly disrupt viewer comprehension and are often considered serious due to their high impact on narrative clarity. Table 3 presents selected instances of semantic errors from the corpus. In the first example, a positive assertion in the ST is rendered as a negation in the TT, resulting in a misleading and potentially confusing subtitle. In the second example, the term “blank-to-blank”, likely a placeholder or stylized expression, is mistranslated as “bank to bank”, which produces a nonsensical and irrelevant phrase in Persian. The third example, from *Manchester by the Sea*, illustrates the subtitler’s failure to capture the speaker’s hedged and persuasive tone. The ST phrase “I didn’t think you’re wrong about that” is intended as a nuanced concession; however, the Persian subtitle translates it as a direct contradiction: “I think you are wrong”, thereby misrepresenting both the speaker’s intent and interpersonal dynamics.

Table 3. Functional error, subcategory of semantic errors

Film	Original Segment	Subtitle Back Translation
1 <i>The Danish Girl</i>	Hans said the Germans might check your papers. You're nearly there.	هانس گفت آلمانی‌ها مدارکت رو بررسی نمیکنن Back Translation (BT): Hans said the Germans won't check your documents.
2 <i>The American Honey</i>	All right, blank-to-blank for Sean	بانک به بانک برای شون BT: Bank to bank for Sean
3 <i>Manchester by the Sea</i>	Listen, I didn't think you're wrong about that	فکر می‌کنم اشتباه می‌کنی BT: I think you are wrong.

These examples illustrate the amateur subtitlers' difficulty in handling ambiguity, implied meaning, and figurative language, leading to semantic errors that range in severity. In all cases, these mistranslations impair narrative coherence and would likely be classified as standard to serious errors under Pedersen's severity rubric.

4.1.2. Stylistic error

Stylistic errors occur when the tone, register, or linguistic style of the TT fails to align with the communicative context or genre expectations. While such errors may not distort semantic meaning, they affect the naturalness and appropriateness of the subtitle and can disrupt the viewer's immersion (Pedersen, 2017a). As shown in Table 4, in the first example, the phrase "smart-ass" conveys a sarcastic, slightly mocking tone, implying arrogance or cheeky cleverness. However, the Persian translation "زرنگ" (clever) neutralizes this tone and fails to capture the pejorative or confrontational undertone of the original expression. While "زرنگ" may suggest intelligence or cunning, it lacks the informal, ironic edge conveyed by "smart-ass". This misalignment results in a stylistic error, as the attitude and speaker's tone are softened in the target text. A more accurate rendering might involve colloquial terms such as "پرو" (impudent) or "کله‌شق" (headstrong), which better reflect the source tone.

In the second example, the English phrase “Jake can hustle” conveys a sense of energetic, street-smart behavior—often tied to informal entrepreneurship, resourcefulness, or making money through skill or determination. In contrast, the Persian rendering “خیلی وحشیانه کار کنه” (can work very savagely/brutally) introduces a tone of aggression or violence that distorts the original meaning. This translation not only diverges from the intended nuance but also alters the social characterization of the speaker, leading to a stylistic mismatch and a possible semantic error. The shift from urban slang to a violent register misrepresents the original tone and diminishes the coherence of the character portrayal.

Table 4. Category of functional equivalence, subcategory of stylistic

	Film	Original Segment	Subtitle Back Translation
1	<i>The Danish Girl</i>	Like a smart-ass power agent.	مثل یه مامور برق زرننگ BT: like a clever electricity agent.
2	<i>The American Honey</i>	Jake can hustle. Jake can hustle.	جیک می تونه خیلی وحشیانه کار کنه. BT: Jake can work very violently/brutally.

In the cases discussed, the error was not severe enough to hinder comprehension or narrative coherence and was therefore categorized as a minor stylistic error. However, such discrepancies underscore a broader pattern in amateur subtitling: the frequent tendency to adopt overly formal or written Persian registers when rendering casual or colloquial English dialogue. These observations further support the argument for culturally adaptive refinements to the FAR model. Specifically, errors involving pragmatic misrepresentation, especially in socially or culturally embedded speech, may warrant redefined penalty weights or the addition of subcategories. This is particularly relevant in contexts like Iran, where high diglossia and censorship pressures influence subtitlers’ linguistic choices and stylistic decisions.

4.2. Acceptability

The second core dimension of the FAR model is Acceptability, which refers to the linguistic naturalness and formal correctness of subtitles in the target

language. This dimension comprises three subcategories: grammar, spelling, and idiomaticity (Pedersen, 2017a). Errors in this domain do not necessarily result in semantic distortion but may affect the fluency, readability, and cultural intelligibility of the subtitles. For viewers, such errors can create disruption or confusion, especially when idioms or syntax feel foreign or mechanical.

4.2.1. Grammar error

Grammatical errors involve deviations from standard syntactic or morphological rules of the target language. These may be the result of literal translation, omission of inflectional elements, or incorrect word order.

In Table 5, the first example contains a clear grammatical error due to an incorrect verb form in Persian. The phrase “شروع کن” is the imperative form of the verb “شروع کردن” (to start), meaning “Start!” This is inappropriate in this context, where the original English sentence is in the past tense third-person singular (She started). The use of “شروع کن” not only changes the verb tense and mood (from past declarative to imperative), but also disrupts the grammatical and narrative coherence of the subtitle. It may confuse viewers, as it appears to command someone (perhaps the viewer or a character) rather than describing a past action by a third person. This is a major grammar error under the Acceptability parameter of the FAR model. The incorrect verb form significantly affects the grammatical correctness and interpretability of the subtitle. It results in a misrepresentation of the original utterance’s grammatical structure, leading to potential misunderstanding by the audience.

The second example from *Manchester by the Sea* reflects a structural mismatch due to literal translation. The phrase “کسی داره تیکه تیکه میش نمیکنه” is grammatically awkward because it combines the affirmative progressive auxiliary “داره” (“is [doing]”) with the negated verb “نمیکنه” (“is not doing”). In Persian, such a construction is not standard, as the presence of “داره” typically signals a positive progressive action, while negation creates a semantic and grammatical contradiction. This structure may be acceptable in colloquial speech with heavy emphasis or irony, but it compromises the natural flow and clarity in the written subtitle. Although the meaning remains comprehensible, the use of the progressive auxiliary with a negated verb

results in a minor grammar error that affects the acceptability and fluency of the subtitle. It reflects a common challenge in amateur subtitling where informal speech patterns are transferred into written subtitles without proper grammatical adjustment.

Table 5. Category of acceptability, subcategory of grammar errors

	Film	Original Segment	Subtitle Back Translation
1	<i>The Danish Girl</i>	She started stabbing everybody in the restroom right there.	او شروع کن به چاقو زدن به همه، توی دستشویی همینجا. BT: She start (imperative) stabbing everyone, in the restroom, right here
2	<i>Manchester by the Sea</i>	Nobody is smashin' it to pieces! It's fine!	کسی داره تیکه تیکهش نمیکنه! سالمه! BT: Somebody is not tearing it to pieces! It's fine!

These examples reflect a recurring pattern of under translation and structural interference from English, which suggests that amateur subtitlers may rely too heavily on surface equivalence rather than syntactic and stylistic norms in Persian.

4.2.2. Spelling errors

Spelling errors in subtitles can compromise comprehension and visual processing, especially in time-constrained viewing contexts. Such errors are particularly problematic in subtitling, where each word must be easily and quickly readable (Pedersen, 2017a).

In Table 6, the first example from *American Honey* includes a misspelled or typographically distorted word, “Naghti”, that has no recognizable meaning in Persian and appears to be a keyboard slip, perhaps intended to be “وقتی” (“when”). This kind of error impairs viewer understanding and may cause distraction.

For the second example, it seems that the Persian letter ‘ر’ has been omitted from the word ‘میام’ results in a verb that is morphologically and semantically incorrect. The back-translation, “I’ll come to your opinion too”, demonstrates how the subtitle’s grammatical incoherence and orthographic inaccuracy distort the intended meaning of “I’ll definitely consider it”.

Table 6. Category of acceptability, subcategory of spelling errors

Film	Original Segment	Subtitle Back Translation
1 <i>The American Honey</i>	Once you get this one fucking step down,	نقته این به قدم لعنتی رو برداری BT: Naghti you get this one damn step.
2 <i>Manchester by the Sea</i>	I'll definitely consider it.	نظر تو رو هم به حساب میام I'll come to your opinion too.

Given their potential to confuse or mislead the viewer, these spelling mistakes are classified as serious errors, despite their seemingly minor surface features. Their presence points to a broader need for proofreading protocols and typographical awareness in amateur subtitling practices.

4.2.3. Idiomaticity error

Idiomaticity refers to the use of expressions that are natural, culturally appropriate, and conventional in the target language. Idiomatic errors occur when literal translation fails to preserve the figurative or pragmatic function of a phrase, especially when a culture-specific expression has a well-established equivalent in the target language (Venuti, 2008; Pedersen, 2017a).

In Table 7, both examples feature idiomatic expressions that are rendered literally. In the first case, “bottom of the barrel”, a widely recognized metaphor for something of poor quality or low value, is awkwardly translated word-for-word. The subtitle fails to convey the connotation and does not use the common Persian equivalent. The second example, “pissing in the wind”, is a slang idiom indicating a futile or pointless effort. The literal translation used in the subtitle both violates norms of register and fails to convey the idiom’s intended meaning. A culturally appropriate Persian equivalent, such as “آب در هاون کوبیدن,” would have been more effective, though this study does not advocate prescriptive solutions. Rather, the literal approach here results in a serious idiomaticity error that hinders comprehension.

Table 7. Category of acceptability, subcategory of idiomaticity

Film	Original Segment	Subtitle Back Translation
1 <i>The American Honey</i>	bottom barrel,	ته بشکه BT: Bottom of the barrel
2 <i>Misconduct</i>	So that’s like pissing in the wind, son.	برای همین این مثل شاشیدن تو باد می مونه. BT: So that’s like pissing in the wind.

These cases exemplify a frequent challenge for amateur subtitlers: the inability or reluctance to apply idiomatic substitutions, either due to unfamiliarity with target-language norms or an overreliance on literal rendering. Such errors significantly reduce subtitle quality and suggest a need for idiom training and contrastive phraseology exercises in amateur subtitler education.

4.3. Readability

The third dimension of Pedersen's (2017a) FAR model is Readability, which concerns the technical presentation of subtitles. This includes segmentation and spotting, punctuation and graphics, and reading speed and line length. While errors in this category were less frequent than those found in Functional Equivalence or Acceptability, their presence still has a meaningful impact on viewer processing, cognitive load, and visual fluency.

4.3.1. Segmentation and spotting errors

Segmentation and spotting errors refer to problems with the synchronization of subtitles with the corresponding audio, as well as the inappropriate division of subtitle lines. Such issues may cause subtitles to appear too early, too late, or not at all, reducing the fluidity of subtitle delivery and potentially confusing the viewer (Pedersen, 2017a).

In the first case, the subtitle content appears to have no relation to the actual spoken dialogue; the line "No, I have a little fucking cartoon" is replaced by a visually misplaced response, "Here is Pahinhill Street – ok", indicating poor alignment between speech and subtitle. In the second case, the character's simple but emotionally salient phrase "I'm so happy" receives no translation at all, despite being clearly audible and significant in context. These errors demonstrate a breakdown in temporal coordination and subtitler attentiveness.

Table 8. *Manchester by the Sea*, category of readability, subcategory of segmentation and spotting errors

	Spot	Original Segment	Subtitle Back Translation
1	01:46:20,531 01:46:22,967	No, I have a little fucking cartoon.	- اینجا خیابون پیچن هیله باشه BT: Here is Pahinhill Street

			-ok
2	01:47:05,960 01:47:08,830	I'm so happy.	(no translation)

Although relatively rare, segmentation and spotting errors are highly disruptive when they occur. They can undermine narrative coherence and suggest a lack of basic subtitle-timing knowledge among amateur subtitlers.

4.3.2. Punctuation and graphic errors

This category includes errors in basic orthographic conventions, such as incorrect use of punctuation marks or visual clutter that impedes readability. While such errors may not drastically alter meaning, they reduce the professional appearance and legibility of subtitles, especially when they violate well-established reading norms (Pedersen, 2017a).

As illustrated in Table 9, the first example from *Misconduct* involves the improper use of quotation marks. The brand name “Vypraxilin” should have been clearly delimited to mark it as a proper noun or specialized term, but the subtitle awkwardly encloses only part of the phrase. In the second example from *American Honey*, the subtitle begins with a hashtag (#) and a misplaced comma, both of which are ungrammatical and visually disruptive. These unnecessary graphic elements distract the viewer and obscure the speech rhythm.

Table 9. Category of readability, subcategory of punctuation and graphic errors

Film	Original Segment	Subtitle Back Translation
1 <i>Misconduct</i>	I was part of the initial test group for the drug Vypraxilin.	من جزو گروهی بودم که داروی وپراکسیلین "روش آزمایش میشد" BT: I was part of the group that the drug Vypraxilin “has been tested on.”
2 <i>The American Honey</i>	# 'Cause everybody here knows your name	چون همه اینجا، اسمت رو میدونند BT: # ‘, Cause everybody here knows your name

These errors are categorized as minor, but their accumulation can erode the subtitle’s visual fluency. They also reveal inconsistency in subtitling

conventions and a lack of punctuation awareness, particularly when subtitles are manually typed without proofreading tools.

4.3.3. Reading speed and line length

Reading speed and line length are crucial components of subtitle legibility. Excessively long lines, dense blocks of text, or slow/fast display speeds can interfere with viewers' ability to read comfortably within the available screen time (Gottlieb, 2005; Pedersen, 2017a).

As shown in Table 10, the first example from *The American Honey* includes a translator's personal tag ("Ali.Es: Translation by...") embedded within the subtitle. This unnecessary addition introduces extraneous visual content, slowing down reading and breaking the illusion of natural speech. The second example from *Misconduct* features three full lines of subtitle text displayed simultaneously, which overwhelms the viewer and covers nearly half the screen, well beyond standard two-line subtitle practice.

Table 10. Category of readability, subcategory of reading speed and line length

Film	Original Segment	Subtitle Back Translation
1 <i>The American Honey</i>	Fuck.	لعنتی ترجمه Ali.Es BT: Ali.Es: damn Translation
2 <i>Misconduct</i>	Jane is the advisor we retained. Private org. Kidnap and rescue	”جین” مشاوریه که استخدامش کردیم توی یک سازمان خصوصی و در بخش آزادسازی گروگان‌ها کار میکنه Jane is the advisor we employed; he is working in a private organization in the section of rescuing hostages

These are clear violations of subtitle formatting norms and fall under standard readability errors. They not only challenge viewer processing but also suggest an absence of training in subtitle design conventions such as optimal character-per-line limits and professional screen layout.

While readability errors were relatively infrequent in the analyzed corpus, their effects on viewer experience are non-negligible. The most prominent issues, spotting mismatches, unedited screen clutter, and excessive line length, stem from a lack of familiarity with guidelines, rather than

linguistic deficiency. These findings reinforce the importance of technical training in subtitler education. Many amateur subtitlers appear unaware of basic subtitle layout standards, punctuation practices, or timing mechanics. Incorporating modules on segmentation techniques, spotting accuracy, and interface-based editing into subtitling workshops could address these gaps and raise the overall quality of amateur AVT products.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out to evaluate the quality of Persian amateur subtitles produced for five English-language drama films, employing [Pedersen's \(2017\)](#) FAR model as the primary evaluative framework. Through the meticulous error analysis, semantic errors emerged as the most frequent and consequential (121 errors), surpassing errors related to punctuation and graphics (24 errors), spelling (23 errors), and grammar (19 errors). These findings not only corroborate earlier observations in the domain of AVT ([Pym, 2010](#); [Bogucki, 2009](#)) but also reveal particular challenges inherent in amateur subtitling practices, especially within culturally rich and linguistically complex contexts like Persian.

Table 11. Frequency distribution of subcategories of the far model in the corpus

	<i>The Danish Girl</i>	<i>The American Honey</i>	<i>Moonlight</i>	<i>Manchester by the Sea</i>	<i>Misconduct</i>	Total
Semantic Error	8	43	28	27	15	121
Stylistic Error	1	2	0	0	0	3
Grammar Error	5	2	1	11	0	19
Spelling Error	1	16	2	3	1	23
Idiomatcity	0	2	0	0	3	5
Segmentation and Spotting	0	0	0	2	0	2
Punctuation and Graphics	0	18	2	2	2	24
Reading speed and line length	0	4	0	0	2	6

A comparison of the frequency percentage elucidates the technical and translational competence of amateur subtitlers. The primary competence of a translator is its ability to find suitable equivalences and accurately convey semantic concepts (Pym, 2010). An examination of the error distribution, summarized in Table 11 and visualized in Figures 1 and 2, demonstrates that Functional Equivalence constitutes the most error-prone aspect of amateur subtitling. Comprising 60% of all recorded errors (121 out of 203), this dimension encompasses semantic accuracy, which proved to be the weakest link across all five films examined. The dominance of semantic errors aligns with the scholarly consensus that meaning transfer in subtitling is a complex task, especially when subtitlers are confronted with emotionally nuanced dialogue, taboos, and culturally embedded expressions. Indeed, the drama genre, known for its rich linguistic texture and subtle pragmatic cues, amplifies the difficulty of maintaining semantic fidelity, thereby exposing the limitations of amateur subtitlers who often lack specialized training or experience.

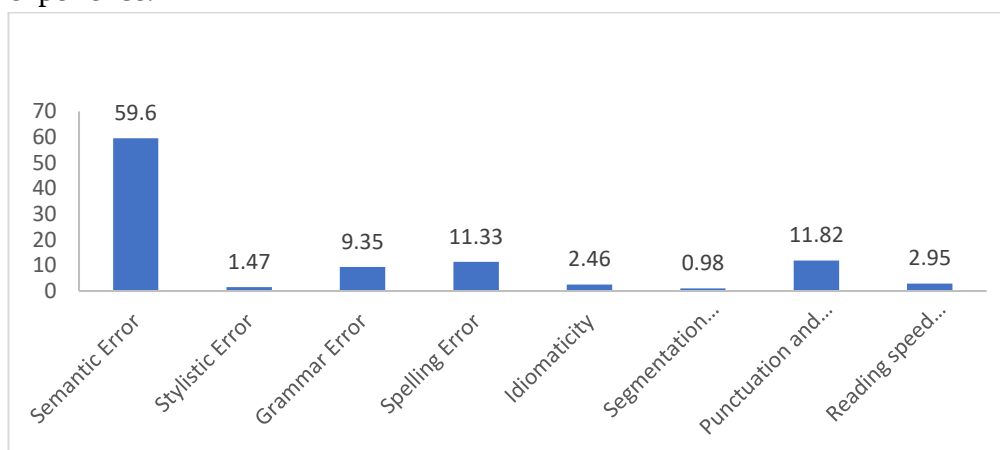


Figure 1. The percentage of the frequency for subcategories of the FAR Model

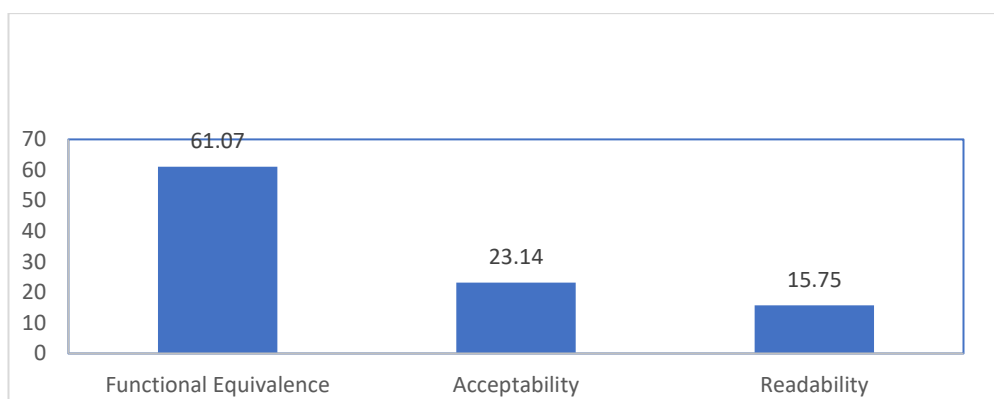


Figure 2. The percentage of the frequency for categories of the Far Model

5.1. Key patterns and theoretical implications

The error patterns revealed by this study illustrate two interrelated but distinct trends with significant theoretical implications for translation studies and AVT. First, there is a clear manifestation of translational insecurity related to meaning transfer. Amateur subtitlers consistently struggled with preserving semantic fidelity, especially when interpreting pragmatic functions, idiomatic expressions, and hedged statements—those utterances where meaning is implicit or context-dependent rather than explicit. This tendency to favor literal translations over contextually appropriate equivalents suggests a gap in training and conceptual understanding of translation as a negotiation of meaning rather than mere word substitution. Literalism in translation, while sometimes a protective strategy for less experienced translators, ultimately leads to diminished communicative effectiveness in subtitles. This is especially problematic in AVT, where space and time constraints demand economy and precision in language. The findings resonate with the broader theoretical discourse emphasizing the translator's role as an active mediator who must balance faithfulness to the ST with the communicative needs of the target audience (Venuti, 1995; Baker, 2018). In the case of Persian amateur subtitlers, the prevailing literalism may reflect insufficient exposure to or understanding of these translational dynamics, as well as a lack of pedagogical emphasis on pragmatic competence.

The second notable trend concerns the interplay between technical proficiency and linguistic competence. While the participants exhibited commendable skills in technical subtitling tasks, evidenced by the minimal

segmentation and spotting errors (only two in total) and relatively few problems with line length and timing, these competencies did not translate into corresponding linguistic accuracy. This finding aligns with [Pedersen's \(2017a\)](#) observation that readability tends to be less problematic in fan- or amateur-created subtitles due to the widespread use of digital subtitling tools and software. However, this technical fluency does not suffice to compensate for deficiencies in semantic and idiomatic accuracy.

The FAR model's penalty point system, detailed in [Table 12](#), further underscores the disproportionate impact of semantic errors, which accounted for nearly 70% of all penalty points (136 out of 195.25). This highlights an important critique of the FAR model's weighting logic: while it robustly captures the presence and severity of errors, it may require recalibration to better reflect the nuanced challenges of subtitling in environments like Iran with censorship and numerous cultural and political constraints. This suggests the necessity for context-sensitive adaptations of quality assessment frameworks to accommodate the diversity of amateur subtitling practices and target audiences worldwide.

Table 12. Penalty point system for different error types in each film

	<i>The Danish Girl</i>	<i>The American Honey</i>	<i>Moonlight</i>	<i>Manchester by the Sea</i>	<i>Misconduct</i>	Total
Semantic Error	5.5	54.5	32	29.5	14.5	136
Stylistic Error	0.25	0.75	0	0	0	1
Grammar Error	2.5	1.25	1	5.75	0	10.5
Spelling Error	0.25	5	0.5	0.75	1	7.5
Idiomatcity	0	1.25	0	0	0.75	2
Segmentation and Spotting	0	0	0	2	0	2
Punctuation and Graphics	0	8	0.5	0.5	0.75	9.75
Reading speed and line length	0	1.75	0	0	2	3.75
Total for Each Film	8.5	72.5	34	38.5	19	

The extent of each error type based on the Pedersen (2017a) penalty point system is different from the order of errors based on their frequency, which is due to the different penalty point systems (minor, standard, and serious) and the severity of the impact of the mistake on the audience's understanding (Table 13).

Table 13. Frequency and type of errors based on errors classified by far model

			<i>The Danish Girl</i>	<i>The American Honey</i>	<i>Moonlight</i>	<i>Manchester by the Sea</i>	<i>Misconduct</i>
Functional Equivalence	semantic	minor	2.5	5.5	5	6.5	3.5
		standard	3	15	9	5	5
		major	0	34	18	18	6
	stylistic	minor	0.25	0.25	0	0	0
		standard	0	0.5	0	0	0
		major	0	0	0	0	0
Acceptability	grammar errors	minor	0.5	0.25	0	1.25	0
		standard	1	0	0	1.5	0
		major	1	1	1	3	0
	spelling errors	minor	0.25	3	0.5	0.75	0
		standard	0	2	0	0	0
		major	0	0	0	0	1
	idiomaticity errors	minor	0	0.25	0	0	0.75
		standard	0	0	0	0	0
		major	0	1	0	0	0
Readability	segmentation and spotting	minor	0	0	0	0	0
		standard	0	0	0	0	0
		serious	0	0	0	2	0
	punctuation and graphics	minor	0	3	0.5	0.5	0.25
		standard	0	1	0	0	0.5
		serious	0	4	0	0	0
	reading speed and line length	minor	0	0.75	0	0	0
		standard	0	0	0	0	0
		serious	0	1	0	0	2

While the present study concentrates on amateur subtitling, the findings offer insights that extend to other forms of non-professional AVT in Iran, including fansubbing, activist subtitling, and commission-based volunteer projects. The persistent issues with semantic fidelity, idiomatic inaccuracy, and contextual mismatch are likely to affect any subtitling category in which translators operate without formal training, editorial oversight, or access to institutionalized subtitling norms. As such, the error patterns identified here,

particularly those related to meaning transfer and cultural adaptation, may serve as diagnostic tools for understanding the broader challenges of Persian AVT in semi-professional contexts.

5.2. Pedagogical and professional implications

The implications of this study are especially pertinent to subtitling pedagogy and the professional development of amateur and aspiring subtitlers. The prevalent error patterns highlight the need for comprehensive training curricula that integrate both linguistic and technical skills with theoretical knowledge of translation principles and cross-cultural communication. Specifically, subtitling education should begin by focusing on semantic and pragmatic fidelity, equipping trainees with the ability to interpret implied meaning, speech acts, and tonal nuances embedded in dialogue. This requires not only linguistic knowledge but also awareness of the ST's communicative intentions and the cultural context of both source and target audiences. Without such competencies, subtitlers are prone to literalism and misinterpretation, as evidenced by this study's findings. Moreover, training should emphasize idiomatic and cultural substitution strategies. Subtitlers must learn to identify culture-specific references, metaphors, and idioms and develop skills to adapt these effectively within the constraints of subtitle space and timing. Technical skills, including line segmentation, spotting, and screen layout, remain essential components of subtitling training. Although amateur subtitlers showed proficiency in these areas, reinforcing these skills ensures the maintenance of readability and viewer comfort, which are critical for effective subtitle reception.

Finally, incorporating quality assessment practice based on the FAR model or similar frameworks into subtitling pedagogy could foster critical awareness of error types, their severity, and their potential impact on the viewer. By familiarizing students with assessment criteria and penalty systems, educators can promote self-evaluation and quality control skills, which are crucial for professional growth. In sum, integrating translation theory, cross-cultural competence, and technical subtitling practice in a cohesive curriculum is vital to bridging the gap between enthusiasm and expertise among amateur subtitlers, a gap that has long been recognized (Bogucki, 2009; Massidda, 2015). Only through such holistic education can

amateur subtitlers progress toward producing subtitles that meet both linguistic and cultural standards of quality.

5.3. Limitations and directions for future research

While this study contributes valuable insights into Persian amateur subtitling practices, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The scope was confined to a single genre, drama, and focused exclusively on the English-Persian language pair. Additionally, all analyzed subtitles originated from a single amateur subtitling platform, *Tiny Movies*. These constraints limit the generalizability of the findings across other genres, languages, subtitling communities, and professional contexts.

Despite these limitations, the thematic and translational challenges identified, particularly those pertaining to semantic fidelity and idiomatic transfer, likely resonate in many non-professional subtitling environments globally. Future research should build upon this foundation by expanding the empirical scope. Incorporating a wider range of genres, such as comedy, action, or documentary, could elucidate genre-specific subtitling challenges and error tendencies. Similarly, exploring different language pairs would provide comparative insights into how linguistic and cultural distances affect amateur subtitling quality. Further research could also adopt a reception-oriented approach, investigating how target audiences perceive and process various types of subtitling errors. Such studies, following [Gerber-Morón et al. \(2018\)](#) and [Szarkowska and Gerber-Morón \(2018a\)](#), would deepen understanding of the real-world impact of subtitling quality on comprehension, enjoyment, and viewer engagement. Experimental interventions aimed at training amateur subtitlers and assessing their efficacy would provide practical recommendations for pedagogical design and quality improvement. Lastly, there is a need for further refinement of quality assessment models like FAR to better accommodate the linguistic and cultural realities of diverse subtitling contexts. Adapting the weighting of semantic and idiomatic categories in the penalty system could yield more sensitive and contextually appropriate evaluation metrics, thereby improving the reliability and validity of quality assessments.

5.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study affirms that semantic accuracy remains the most significant challenge confronting Persian amateur subtitlers, with literalism and context-mismatch dominating the error landscape. While their technical proficiency in subtitling software and formatting is noteworthy, effective subtitling demands a more complex fusion of linguistic accuracy, cultural adaptation, and visual clarity. As Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2014) emphasize, subtitles must be “semantically and syntactically self-contained”, a standard that remains largely unmet by amateur subtitling efforts examined in this research. The evidence underscores the urgent need for structured subtitling training programs, editorial oversight, and context-sensitive quality frameworks that address the unique demands of amateur subtitling. This study echoes prior calls (Bogucki, 2009; Massidda, 2015) to bridge the gap between enthusiasm and expertise by integrating translation theory, intercultural competence, and AVT practice in subtitler education.

In the contemporary era of global media exchange, where audiovisual content crosses linguistic and cultural borders with increasing frequency, ensuring subtitle quality, particularly in ideologically complex genres like drama, is imperative. Models such as FAR must be revisited and adapted to reflect the lived realities of amateur practice and the diverse expectations of target audiences. Only through such efforts can amateur subtitling transcend its current limitations and fulfill its potential as a vehicle for intercultural communication and artistic expression.

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