

## Retranslation in Terms of Film and TV Adaptations: Case of Sherlock Holmes

### Film ve Dizi Uyarlamaları Açısından Yeniden Çeviri: Sherlock Holmes Örneği

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#### ABSTRACT

So far the research on retranslation has mainly dealt with literary texts. However, this paper problematizes film and TV adaptations as types of retranslations and aims to reveal the motives of frequent Sherlock Holmes readaptations and discuss them with the ones that are relevant to literary retranslations. *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011), *Sherlock* (2010), *Elementary* (2012), *Mr. Holmes* (2015), and *Holmes & Watson* (2018) have been chosen to form a corpus. This study will analyze the strategies adopted by each readaptation and the differences between them. The methodology developed by Peridikaki (2017) for observing shifts between a source text and its adaptation is used with changes to adjust it to this study, which excludes the source material and discusses the film readaptations on their own. Furthermore, based on Inez Okulska's (2016) arguments, the transmedial process of *Sherlock* (2010) will be presented as a form of re-iteration. This study argues that just as retranslations of a work improve its position in the literary world, film and TV readaptations and their tie-in products as re-iterations can strengthen the position of an adapted work in media.

**Keywords:** adaptation, retranslation, Sherlock Holmes, tie-in products, transmedial

#### ÖZ

Şimdiye kadar yeniden çeviri üzerine yapılan araştırmalar çoğunlukla edebi metinleri araştırma konusu olarak ele almıştır. Fakat bu makale, film ve dizi uyarlamalarını yeniden çeviri türleri olarak sınıflandırarak sık aralıklarla yapılan yeniden uyarlamaların nedenlerini ortaya çıkarmayı ve bu nedenleri edebi yeniden çevirilerle ilgili olan gerekçelerle tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu araştırma için seçilen bütüncü *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011), *Sherlock* (2010), *Elementary* (2012), *Mr. Holmes* (2015) ve *Holmes & Watson* (2018) dizi ve filmlerinde oluşmaktadır. Bu çalışma, bütüncü oluşturulan Sherlock Holmes yeniden uyarlamalarının benimsediği stratejileri ve aralarındaki farkları analiz edecektir. Analizde Peridikaki'nin (2017) kaynak metin ve onun uyarlaması arasındaki kaymaları gözlemlemek için geliştirdiği metodoloji kullanılmış, ancak kaynak materyali dâhil etmeyerek film yeniden uyarlamalarını kendi başlarına tartışabilmek adına Peridikaki'nin önerdiği metodoloji üzerinde bazı değişiklikler yapılmıştır. Ayrıca Inez Okulska'nın (2016) argümanlarından yola çıkarak, *Sherlock* (2010) dizisinin medyalar ötesi süreci de bu çalışma kapsamında bir yineleme biçimi olarak ele alınmaktadır. Bu çalışma, yeniden çevirilerin bir eserin edebiyat dünyasındaki konumunu iyileştirdiği gibi, film ve dizi uyarlamalarının, bir yineleme türü olarak bağlantılı ürünler ile birlikte, bir uyarlama yapının medyadaki konumunu güçlendirebileceğini ileri sürmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** uyarlama, yeniden çeviri, Sherlock Holmes, bağlantılı ürünler, medyalar ötesi

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## 1. Introduction

Most of the theoretical discussions and research on retranslation are centered on literary texts (Paloposki and Koskinen, 2010; Walsh, 2019; Brownlie, 2006). Furthermore, these studies mostly dwell upon the binary evaluations of lack and improvement (Berman, 1990, as cited in Massardier-Kenney, 2015; Venuti, 2003). Different from these studies, the current paper problematizes retranslation in terms of film and TV adaptations in order to reveal the motives behind frequent readaptations and compare them to ones that are pertinent to literary retranslations. For this concern, six recent Sherlock Holmes films and series have been selected to form a corpus: *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011), *Sherlock* (2010), *Elementary* (2012), *Mr. Holmes* (2015) and *Holmes & Watson* (2018). Since Sherlock Holmes as a character is the most depicted human character on TV and screen, 254 times in different films, series, dramas, and documentaries (Guinness World Records News, 2012), it can be easily argued that he has a micro repertoire of its own in the cinema repertoire as a cinematic individual figure. Therefore, this vast repertoire provides a fertile subject for a study of retranslation in terms of film adaptations. So as to unveil the competition and interaction between the Sherlock Holmes readaptations in their micro repertoire, this paper will analyze the strategies adopted by each readaptation, which have a goal of competing in the Sherlock Holmes cinematic repertoire. Furthermore, based on Inez Okulska's (2016) argument that some translations start as an interlingual literary translation but the final product is not just a translation, it is "rather a stimulus toward transmedial derivatives, which together constitute a transmedial translation series" (p. 58), this study will also discuss the transmedial process of these adaptations. Françoise Massardier-Kenney (2015) states that "re-iteration is essential [. . .] to make it present in the world of literature" (p. 79). Similarly, this study argues that while retranslations contribute to a work of literature in gaining popularity in the literary repertoire, re-iteration in the form of readaptations can enhance the status of the work in the media as well.

## 2. Literature Review

The literature review has shown that studies on retranslation that include film adaptations mainly deal with audiovisual translation such as dubbing or subtitling (Bywood, 2019; Chaume, 2018; Di Giovanni, 2016; Zanotti, 2018). Unlike these studies, Eker-Roditakis (2019) analyzes the interlingual translation of the Turkish book *Güz Sancısı* (1992) by Yılmaz Karamollaoğlu into Greek and its film adaptation with the same name in 2009. Eker uses Peridikaki's (2017) model to analyze the film adaptation, which premiered both in Turkey and in Greece, and she observes modifications and mutations in characterization and plot structure. Furthermore, she analyzes the transmedial process of this novel to answer the question of what "the effects of film adaptation on translated literature in a given cultural system" are (Eker-Roditakis, 2019, p. 81). She finds out that the reception of the film adaptation in Greece was so powerful that its poster became the cover of the later reprint of the same book in 2009. Although Eker-Roditakis approaches this film adaptation as a retranslation only because it has a previous interlingual translation in the Greek cultural system, her methodology of analysis of the film adaptation, which is developed by Peridikaki (2017), and the theoretical scope of the work involving Okulska's (2016) transmedial concepts will be followed in this study. Thus, the findings of the current study will be complementary to the research on retranslation by expanding the field with the inclusion of film adaptations as research materials on their own.

## 3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Venuti (2007) argues that translation and adaptation have a similar perspective, i.e. both translators and adapters need to decontextualize the source text, thus detaching "its priori materials from their context" (p. 29). However, this process in adaptations is much more complex and might involve addition, omission, and substitution in terms of characters, setting or plot (Venuti, 2007, p. 30). In order to answer the question of how these adaptations survive in the micro cinematic repertoire of Sherlock Holmes, *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011), *Sherlock* (2010-2017), *Elementary* (2012-2019), *Mr. Holmes* (2015) and *Holmes & Watson* (2018) will be analyzed. While two of them are TV series, *Sherlock* and *Elementary*, the rest are movies. The reason behind this selection is that they are released in a very short time span of 9 years and this fact removes the common motive of aging in the literary retranslations from this discussion. Moreover, this short time span of their release brings along competition in terms of the representation of Sherlock on screen. In this analysis, the point of attention will be the difference between various Sherlock characters played by different actors and also how the setting and events around this protagonist change. For this, the current study will adopt the methodology proposed by Katerina Peridikaki (2017). According to her model, which is used for examining changes between a source novel and its film adaptation, there are four narrative units that are seen both in books and in films: the plot structure, the narrative techniques, the characterization, and the

setting. To analyze the changes between the two mediums, Peridikaki proposes to look for shifts that are categorized as modulation, modification, and mutation in these narrative units. She borrows this shift taxonomy from Leuven-Zwart's (1989) classification of translation shifts. However, this analysis will not be connected to the original writings by Arthur Conan Doyle, i.e. it does not include a comparative analysis between the source text and successive target texts. This paper rather focuses on the relations between different selected versions of Sherlock film and series, since Sherlock as a character has been depicted on the screen so many times by so many different actors since the first adaptation in 1900 (according to IMDB), it created a niche only for itself in the cinematic repertoire. Additionally, these Sherlock Holmes movies/series are mostly independent of the original stories by Conan Doyle and each tries to provide a different narrative. Therefore, this paper will look for these shifts among the adaptations that constitute the corpus and mainly the portrayal of the protagonist. Thus, the narrative units that will be discussed in this paper are characterization and setting. According to Peridikaki (2017) modulation in characterization can either involve emphasizing an aspect of the character or understating it, modification shifts are obvious changes in the depiction of the character and mutations refer to certain absent or added elements (p. 17).

The relation between these films and series arises some questions: How can these adaptations co-exist in a rather short times pan? Do they affect each other? Do Sherlock's readaptations and transmedial process contribute to its canonical status? In order to observe Sherlock Holmes's transmedial process, its tie-in products will also be discussed because "the interpretation inscribed by an adaptation can be so powerful as to compete against and forever complicate the viewer's experiences of the adapted materials" (Venuti, 2007, p. 30).

#### 4. Analysis of Shifts

In this section, the corpus of the study will be discussed according to the previously mentioned shifts. The main focal point of the analysis is the changes between different depictions of Sherlock Holmes as a character. It involves his behaviors, appearance, and personality. When the alterations in the setting affect the character portrayal, and they almost always do, temporal and spatial shifts will be also discussed. Since there is not any reference point in this comparison, such as the source text, the shifts will be categorized under modulation, modification, and mutation according to the general portrayal of Sherlock Holmes in other films and series of the corpus. In other words, what features of the detective set him apart from other portrayals will be centered.

##### 4.1. *Sherlock Holmes and Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*

These two films are discussed together since the latter is a sequence with the first and both were directed by Guy Ritchie. The story takes place in Victorian England, which is a spatial modification shift when compared with other films and series of the corpus, except for *Holmes and Watson* (2018). The protagonist is played by Robert Downey Jr. The main shift in characterization is a modification and it is regarding Sherlock's use of deduction skills. He makes use of them mainly for fighting, by predicting the next moves of his opponents and their weak spots. This makes him seem like the main character of an action film, rather than a detective film. Although other Sherlocks have a certain combat skill, they do not fall back on it for almost every case, as Robert Downey Jr.'s Sherlock does. Another modification shift in characterization concerns his clothing and looks. All the other Sherlocks dress either formally or casually but always neatly. However, this Sherlock usually has messy hair and a dirty shirt and what is more, he is a bit shorter than other Sherlocks. His untidiness and height present a different Sherlock in appearance. He gets along with his brother Mycroft, who is depicted as bulky unlike the tall and fit appearance of him in other Sherlock films and series of the corpus of the study. These both are modification shifts in characterization. He uses his disguise skills a lot; this ability especially plays an important role while solving cases in the second film. Overall, his goal in using deduction, appearance, and expertise in disguise are the key distinctions of Downey Jr.'s Sherlock.

##### 4.2. *Sherlock*

*Sherlock* (2010-2017) by BBC is perhaps the most successful of all, with seven Emmy awards in 2014 (The Internet Movie Database, n.d.). Benedict Cumberbatch plays the detective. It involves a temporal modification shift in setting, taking place in modern-day London. This brings along other types of shifts, such as Sherlock's active engagement with technology such as smartphones, the internet, location services, etc. This is a type of mutation shift in characterization. As an example of modification shifts in characterization, when compared to Downey Jr.'s Sherlock, he uses his deduction skills to predict incidents and people's state of mind rather than fighting, for which he has certain abilities but regards as the last resort. Furthermore, his social skills involve amplification as modulation shifts. Cumberbatch's Sherlock is

much more arrogant, looks down on and insults people while explaining how he solved a case or understood something through his deduction skills. He clearly enjoys serial killers and their homicides; one can even say that he gets excited. Similarly, people around him define Sherlock as a psychopath, moreover, he defines himself as a sociopath. He does not really make use of disguise at all, which is a modulation shift; it is only seen as an element of comedy. As for his appearance, he dresses formally, elegantly, and neatly, which is a modification shift. Similarly, his relationship with his brother Mycroft, which is not close like Downey Jr's Sherlock, and the tall and fit figure of the brother are also modification shifts. As a result of the modern version, the military background of Dr. Watson is from Afghanistan. This is an addition to characterization and can be categorized under the mutation shifts. What separates this Sherlock from the others is his modern-day version, treatment of other people, and appearance. In general, this show parts from others principally in terms of the modern-day version and portrayal of a more arrogant and self-claimed sociopath Sherlock Holmes.

### 4.3. *Elementary*

*Elementary* (2012-2019) is an American television series that have offered a "Sherlock Holmes in the United States" perspective to the audience for seven seasons. Johnny Lee Miller portrays Sherlock Holmes and, since the show broadcasted 24 episodes in a season, he had already become the actor who most portrayed the detective on TV or screen at the end of season 2 (Boström, 2018, p. 483). The first shift that brings the series to the forefront among the others is the setting. The story is set in New York City, which is a spatial modification. There is also a temporal modification; it takes place in the modern day, which generates some shifts in character too. For instance, Sherlock makes frequent usage of technology, which could be regarded as a mutation in characterization. Moreover, Sherlock is portrayed as someone who can be rather hyperactive and restless frequently, which makes him less cold-blooded than other Sherlocks. This is categorized as a modulation shift. As another example of modulation shifts, Sherlock's drug addiction got so out of control that he was brought to New York from London to go to rehab by his father. In fact, spatial modification is built upon this factor. This makes his relationship with his father more relevant to the story. He dresses casually which is a modification shift since other Sherlocks dress rather formally. As for the other characters in the show, John Watson becomes Joan Watson and James Moriarty becomes Jamie Moriarty, both are female. This is also a modification in characterization. As for Joan Watson, she does not have a military past like John Watson, which is a mutation shift. Overall, the foregrounded features of *Elementary* are the modern-day American version, the amplified drug addiction of Sherlock, the lack of cold-bloodedness, and female characters that are male in other shows and films.

### 4.4. *Mr. Holmes*

*Mr. Holmes* (2015) is a film directed by Bill Condon. This is perhaps the most alternative and different take on Sherlock Holmes compared to the other shows and films of the corpus. The story takes place in 1947, in a cottage by southern England, which is both a temporal and spatial modification. Ian McKellen plays a 93 years old retired Sherlock Holmes, which is a modification shift in characterization and it almost controls all the other shifts in the film. For instance, we see an amnesiac Sherlock, who forgets the events of the past and names, which is a mutation shift, since all the other Sherlocks are famous for their memory. Other examples of this type of shift concern his emotions. Unlike other Sherlocks, the old Sherlock has lots of emotions, the dominant one being regret. He regrets his failure in the last case and exiles himself to this village and isolates himself from the outer world. Furthermore, he is kind and better with other people compared to the rest of the corpus. While the film flashbacks to his last cases, we see a friendly Sherlock who does not despise people. In fact, he is even affectionate to the child of his housekeeper. In addition, since he is retired, he does not actively use his deduction skills. This can be categorized as a modification shift in characterization. In other Sherlock, an interest in beekeeping is observed, for instance, the Sherlock of *Elementary* has beehives on his rooftop. However, it is more than that for McKellen's Sherlock, an everyday occupation, which is a modulation shift. Also, we see no reference to his drug addiction, which is observed somehow in other Sherlocks. This is also an omission, hence a mutation shift in characterization. Overall, the shift in *Mr. Holmes*, which is obvious and relates to other shifts is his age. But after all the successful readaptations of this corpus, it might be argued that this film required an original, unprecedented approach to the detective in order to claim a place in the repertoire.

### 4.5. *Holmes & Watson*

This film is the most recent one of the corpus, released in 2018. Will Ferrell plays Sherlock Holmes and it is quite different from the other ones since it is a parody film. However, it is quite unsuccessful in the eyes of critics (O'Connell,

2018). Being a parody, the shifts are done with a goal of humor. Holmes uses his deduction skills quite frequently but mostly turns out to be mistaken. He makes wrong judgments about people and miscalculates actions. For instance, he uses his deduction skills in combat, just like Downey Jr.'s Sherlock, however, fails to actualize them. He is also not as sharp-witted as the protagonists of other adaptations. These can be regarded as modification shifts in characterization. There are some shifts regarding Holmes, which might be categorized as mutation shifts. For example, he cannot stand to see a corpse in the mortuary, if he does he vomits. The detective is also portrayed as somewhat sexist since he does not, at first, believe the woman he sees in the mortuary when she says she is a doctor. He thinks she is a cleaner. Furthermore, rather than the famous hat that is allegedly worn by Sherlock Holmes, we see a few different hats throughout the film. There is also an added skill; he can telepathically communicate with his brother Mycroft. The parodic version of Holmes also brings along some modulation shifts, such as his disguise skills. He uses them on a few occasions, but with something as simple as a false mustache, he achieves to deceive Watson. As can be understood, Watson is not very smart, either. He thinks too little of himself when compared to Holmes. This is also a mutation shift. When all things considered, the parodic aim seems to be the sole reason behind the shifts.

### 5. Transmedial Storytelling of the BBC's *Sherlock*

Jenkins (2003) describes transmedial storytelling simply as the “flow of content across multiple channels.” When this phenomenon is considered for Sherlock Holmes in terms of screen adaptations, it goes back to as early as 1900, with the first film adaptation *Sherlock Holmes Baffled* (Ue, 2017, p. 66). It is in fact impossible to account for the whole transmedial journey of the detective in an article. For this concern, this section will only include the BBC's TV series *Sherlock*, since it was perhaps the most influential among the corpus. A strategy for transmedial storytelling is tie-in products, which are divided into two groups: narrative and non-narrative (Okulska, 2016, p. 59). The narrative type conveys the storyline of a work over multiple platforms (Okulska, 2016, p. 60). Perhaps the most obvious example of this is fanfictions. The BBC's *Sherlock* currently has over sixty thousand fanfictions posted to fanfiction.net, some of which have more than one million words. Faye (2012) refers to the series as “a thriving creative organism” (p. 3). Another example of this type is the game of the BBC's *Sherlock*. The app called *Sherlock: The Network* is a mobile game with actual footage of Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman and the users can help the detective solve crimes (The Project Factory AU, 2013). Moreover, *Sherlock: The Case Book* (2012) is another example of the narrative tie-in product. It provides detailed information regarding the cases in the series with photos, police reports, and comments. It was written as if the narrator were there. Yet another example is Mike Collins's coloring book, *Sherlock: The Mind Palace* (2015). It recreates some of the scenes from the series and offers the readers a clue, which could be revealed by coloring. Even a manga adaptation was released in Japan (Loo, 2012). The other type of tie-in product is non-narrative, which is a lot broader. Simply it does not continue the storyline but has a connection to it, for instance, objects such as t-shirts, bags, mugs, etc. (Okulska, 2016, p. 59). Perhaps the most evident was clothing. Belstaff, a British clothing company, “was forced to put the wool trench coat worn by Benedict Cumberbatch back into production” (Petridis, 2010). A spokeswoman of Debenhams, Ruth Attridge stated that there was an increase in garments that were similar to the ones worn by Cumberbatch in the series (Bignell and Shields, 2010). There are also various notebooks, t-shirts, key chains, and scarves related to both the series and Cumberbatch. The transmedial storytelling of the BBC's series was so influential that it can be argued that the show changed the reception of the original works by Doyle. For instance, Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman appear on the cover of a republishing of *Doyle's The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) as Sherlock and Watson (Doyle, 2012). Furthermore, the book involves an introduction written by Benedict Cumberbatch himself. He was also the narrator of an audiobook, which involved four Sherlock Holmes stories written by John Taylor (2015).

### 6. Conclusion

Susam-Saraeva (2003) argues that “retranslations are not necessarily the consequence of ‘ageing’ translations or ‘changing times’ since more than one translation of the same source text may come about within a very short time span” (p. 5). Similarly, aging is not the case for the readaptations of Sherlock Holmes forming the corpus of this study. What can be used here is Pym's (1998) term “active retranslations”, which share “virtually the same cultural location or generation” (p. 82). However, film readaptations appeal to a wider audience that cannot be limited to the same cultural location. Therefore, active readaptations address the same audience with a common interest, which might be numerous, ranging from interest in the Sherlock Holmes stories to detective stories in general. One of the retranslation motives of literary texts, which could be argued for this study as well, is “providing a ‘supplementary’ interpretation” (Eker Roditakis, 2017, p. 2). Indeed, each of these readaptations of Sherlock Holmes provides a different version, a distinct

feature of the detective. While the two series in the corpus offer a modern-day version, one in the US and the other in the UK, one film renders an old and retired Sherlock with a distinct state of mind, others present a fighter protagonist or parodic narration. The motive behind this could be an economical one. Each of the films and series discussed in this paper has a big media company behind them. *Sherlock* has BBC, *Sherlock Holmes* and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* have Warner Bros. Pictures, *Elementary* has CBS, *Mr. Holmes* has 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox and lastly, *Holmes & Watson* has Sony Pictures. Each readaptation was funded by millions of dollars by these companies. Therefore, it is clear that these readaptations have some commercially motivated interests. Therefore, each provides a different perspective so as to appeal to the audience in the densely crowded Sherlock Holmes cinematic repertoire.

Despite the competition, each of these readaptations somehow acquired an audience, some wider than others. This is probably due to the fact that Sherlock Holmes has more than 100 years of past in the cinematic repertoire and it is significantly popular, otherwise, there would not be discussions of new readaptations. As discussed previously, being depicted on the screen more than 250 times, it can be argued that Sherlock Holmes's literary canon status spread to the cinema as well. Massardier-Kenney (2015) argues that intersemiotic re-iteration is one of the factors through which a literary work can earn a place in the world of literature (p. 79). Since Sherlock Holmes has a micro repertoire of his own inside the bigger cinematic repertoire and significant popularity among the audience, it can be argued that these intersemiotic re-iterations in the form of readaptations, dating back to 1900, helped it gain a presence in the media. However, this media popularity also received support from the tie-in products. Okulska (2016) expands the concept of transmedial translation series, which is constituted by an interlingual literary translation and its succeeding transmedial derivatives, "to cover a series of translations that interpret the original in the space of various media, or that remain in a dependent relationship to each other, forming mutually interconnected links in a chain of inspiration" (p. 58). Therefore, the interconnectivity between the narrative and non-narrative tie-in products of BBC's *Sherlock* was another factor that helped it gain a central position in the cinematic repertoire through re-iterations. In fact, this presence in the cinematic repertoire became so dominant that it influenced the literary works of Sherlock Holmes, too. Overall, this paper shows how readaptations of Sherlock can co-exist with different interpretations, which means each tries to avoid others with distinct features, and how the transmedial storytelling of Sherlock Holmes affected its position in the cinematic repertoire and had some amount of influence on the literature as well.

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