



## THE KITE RUNNER AND ITS FILM ADAPTATION AS A SITE OF TRANSLATION

### ÇEVİRİBİLİM GÖZÜNDEN UÇURTMA AVÇISI ROMANI VE FİLM UYARLAMASI

### LE CERF-VOLANT DE KABUL ET SON ADAPTATION FILMIQUE COMME UN SITE DE TRADUCTION

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#### ÖZ

Bu çalışmada, Halid Hüseyin'in Uçurtma Avcısı adlı romanı ile aynı isimle gösterime giren sinema uyarlamasının bir analizi sunulacaktır. Çeviribilimsel bir bakış açısıyla ele alındığında göstergelerarası bir yaklaşımın ürünü olarak karşımıza çıkan bu analiz, “yazılı bir kaynak metin, farklı bir gösterge sistemine uyarlandığında çeviri söylemi açısından neler ifade etmektedir?” sorusunun yanıtını aramaktadır. Bir başka ifadeyle, disiplinler arası bir yaklaşım ile uyarlama çalışmaları, söylem analizi ve göstergelerarası çeviri konularına değinen bu araştırma, farklı ürünlerin alımlanışını biçimlendiren söylemsel göndermeler üzerine yoğunlaşmaktadır. Farklı metin üretici öznelerin, aynı kaynak metni nasıl farklı erek metinlere dönüştürdüğünü gözler önüne seren bu yazıda, roman kaynak kitap, sinema filmi ise onun bir çevirisi olarak ele alınacaktır. Bu iki metin karşılaştırmalı olarak, Çeviribilim alanının yaygın kullanılan sadakat, manipülasyon, metne müdahale gibi paradigmaları üzerinden analiz edilecektir. Edebiyat ve sinema alanlarının özgün şartları da göz önüne alınarak ayrı kültür hinterlandına sunulan bir çeviri ve kaynak metin karşılaştırması yapılacaktır.

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#### ABSTRACT

In this study, the novel *The Kite Runner* (2003) by Khaled Hosseini and its film adaptation, presented with the same title, is analyzed. From a translational point of view, this intersemiotic study questions the references of the rendering of a verbal source text into a different semiotics system. In other words, the study dwells upon an interdisciplinary approach, integrating discourse analysis, and intersemiotic translation, and concentrates on the discursive references that govern the reception of the relevant works. Revealing how different agents of text production might turn the same source text into different target texts, the study views the novel as the source text and its film adaptation as the target text. Accordingly, the original and translated texts are elaborated with references to the prevailing concepts of Translation Studies such as fidelity, intervention, manipulation within a comparative paradigm of source vis-à-vis the target text.

**Keywords:** intersemiotic, discourse analysis, cinema translation, literary translation.

#### ABSTRAIT

Dans cette étude, le roman *Le Cerf-Volant De Kabul* (2003) de Khaled Hosseini et son adaptation filmique, présenté avec le même titre, est analysé. D'un point de vue translationnel, cette étude interroge les références du rendu d'un texte source verbal dans un système sémiotique différent. En d'autres termes, l'étude porte sur les études d'adaptation, l'analyse du discours et la traduction intersémiotique avec une approche interdisciplinaire, et se concentre sur les références discursives qui régissent la réception des œuvres pertinentes. Révélant comment différents acteurs de la production de texte pourraient transformer le même texte source en différents textes cibles, l'étude considère le roman comme le texte source et l'adaptation filmique comme le texte cible, et les analyse à partir des perspectives dominantes des études de traduction telles que la fidélité, intervention, manipulation dans un paradigme comparatif de la source par rapport au texte cible.

**Mots-clés:** intersémiotique, analyse du discours, traduction cinématographique, traduction littéraire.

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## 1. Introduction

This study sets out to illustrate an analysis of the film adaptation of the book *The Kite Runner* (2003) by Khaled Hosseini. The book was adapted to the cinema with the same title *The Kite Runner* (2007), directed by Marc Foster. The script of the film was written by David Benioff. The study focuses on the question “what can an adaptation of a written work of fiction to the cinema screen tell us with respect to translation?”. As a study on products of different sign systems (i.e. verbal and visual), the work requires an interdisciplinary approach. Accordingly, the theoretical background is based on a triad of perspectives. First, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides the analytical framework for the examination of translational references in the film adaptation. Second, the field of Adaptation Studies is visited to explore its foundational premises concerning cinema and other visual media and their relation to translation. Third, the concept of Intersemiotic Translation is explicated as a form of translation that intermingles different sign systems in a translational framework. This scrutiny on the theoretical framework is followed by a comparative analysis of the novel and its film adaptation with a concentration on the plot, spatial context, themes, language use, stylistic elements, and discursive examination of extratextual and metatextual materials.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Discourse is the use of language as a social practice with references that vary according to its contextual framing (Fairclough, 1995, p. 7). It depends on both language and non-linguistic phenomena (Hatim and Mason, 1997, p. 141). Discourse serves as a medium, either explicit or implicit in any place of communication, by which certain referents are communicated in a society (Van Dijk, 1997, p. 25). As Norman Fairclough (1995) argues the importance of the discourse stems from its prominent role in sociocultural reproduction and change (1995, p. 2). In this study, CDA is instrumentalized to unveil the translation of the original discourse into another means of communication, which is cinema in this case.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) enables the researcher to study the discourse from several perspectives, including language, effects of ideology, asymmetrical relations of power, and sociocultural change. There might be variable concentrations of discourses among which repetition, predictability and reproduction of practices, or creativity and innovation can be counted.

Fairclough (1995) defines the CDA in a three-dimensional framework: discourse practice, orders of discourse and intertextual analysis. The first refers to the “ordered set of discursive practices associated with a particular social domain or institution and boundaries and relationships between them” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 12). The second dimension of the framework is concerned with the production, consumption and the distribution of the texts (Fairclough 1995, p. 13); whereas, the third one, as its name suggests, is about the relation of the texts with one another available in the context under study. In this study, it’s the last premise that prevails the analysis, in which the film adaption is regarded as a text on its own right. In this vein, the film and the source novel are elucidated within an intertextual perspective.

## 2.2 Adaptation Studies

The word adaptation is defined as “the process of changing something to suit a new situation; a film/movie book or play that is based on a particular piece of work but that has been changed for a new situation” (Oxford Dictionary, 2000, p. 13). As expressed in this entry, adaptation always brings about change regardless of the adapter, or the adapted. In this study, the word is used to refer to the adaptation of a work of fiction (i.e. a novel), into a visual medium (i.e. cinema).

In the field of Adaptation Studies, it is assumed that adapters cannot simply "transpose" or transfer one particular text from one medium to another. They are to re-interpret, re-work, and re-imagine the precursor text because they are supposed to choose among the various meanings and sensations. In this regard, the decisions of the meaning-making agents are prevalently governed by the concerns over the most compelling and most effective options. In this transformation process, they bring together scenes, characters, plot elements, etc., in a new medium of disseminating intended meaning (Albrecht-Crane, 2010, p. 13).

In nature, film adaptations are multi-layered, requiring a number of issues to be considered. Among them actors, film making conditions, variety of expectations from procedures, as well as time and space can be counted. Film adaptations of novels invariably superimpose “a double set of generic conventions, which are drawn from the generic intertext of the source novel itself, and the one consisting of those genres engaged by the translating medium of film” (Stam, 2008, p. 17). Another important question to be considered in adaptation is context, referring to the elements that go with and alongside the text.

Furthermore, it would not be wrong to argue that many of the changes between novelistic source and film adaptation have to do with ideological and social premises. The question to be asked is “whether the adaptation pushes the novel right by naturalizing and justifying social hierarchies based on class, race, sexuality, gender, region and national belonging or to the “left” by interrogating or leveling hierarchies in an egalitarian manner” (Stam and Raengo, 2007, p. 44).

The analysis of a film adaptation mainly dwells upon moralistic terms such as “infidelity, betrayal, deformation” etc., which is also mostly the case for evaluations on translations. The prevailing negative emphasis on the adaptation derives from “a priori valorization of historical anteriority and seniority, the assumption that the older arts are necessarily better arts” (Stam and Raengo, 2007, p. 4). However, there are also several arguments that negate this claim on the basis of the fact that film is ideally equipped as the novel with its multi-track and multi-format nature to demonstrate particularities as eloquently as a written work of fiction.

Along the same line, Stam and Raengo (2007) compare the situation of a novel and its adaptation with reference to Freudian terms that adaptation is seen as Oedipal son symbolically slaying the source text as “father” (p. 4). Another motive behind the hostility towards a film adaptation might derive from distaste for the unseemly “embeddedness” of the film text; “the seen” is regarded as obscene, which is also mentioned in relation to the issue of censorship. As a characteristic of its medium, a film might evoke

offence “through its inescapable materiality, its incarnated, fleshly enacted characters, its real locals and palpable probes, its carnality and visceral shocks to the nervous system” (Stam and Raengo, 2007, p. 6).

As for the materials of a study on a film adaptation, in addition to the film and source book, the paratextual elements (Genette, 1997) can also be utilized in the discursive analysis, including materials such as posters, trailers, reviews, interviews with the director as well as metatexts referring to the entire tradition of critical rewritings.

### **2.3 Intersemiotic Translation**

The phenomenon of intersemiotic translation represents a special creative domain of language procedures and practices. It yields to “a radical change of habits of interpretation and new forms of sign manipulation” (Aguiar and Queiroz, 2009). In addition, it pragmatically includes the comparison of different systems of semiotics. Nevertheless, despite its relevance to the Translation Studies, the theoretical framework of the field is left quite unexplored compared to other translational processes such as interlingual or intralingual translation. The studies mainly depend on the findings of the semiotics and their relation to the Translation Studies.

Roman Jakobson (2000) distinguishes three ways of interpreting a verbal sign in our quest for making meaning of the world: it may be interpreted into other signs of the same language, into another language, or into another, nonverbal system of symbols referring to intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic translation respectively (p. 114). He defines intersemiotic translation as “transmutation of signs – an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of different systems” (Jakobson, 2000, p. 113). Regarding the act as a creative sign of transmutation, intersemiotic translation involves the reconstruction of an artwork into a distinct semiotic system, by creating a complicated collection of interconnected signs (Gorlee, 2007, p. 347 quoted in Aguiar and Queiroz, 2009). Though this might be applicable to interlingual translation, it is not always possible to come up with direct counterparts between varying semiotic layers such as morphological, phonetic, etc. Accordingly, Aguiar and Queiroz (2009) define intersemiotic translation as “as a multi-hierarchical process of relation between semi-independent layers of descriptions”. In this translational process, certain components of each layer are selected and translated into new material forms.

This claimed partiality evokes the idea of refraction, and the cases of intersemiotic translations can be considered as a form of refracted rewritings in a less obvious form. As Andre Lefevere (2000) expresses “refractions are to be found in the obvious form of translation, or in the less obvious forms of criticism [...], commentary, historiography [...], teaching, the collection of works in anthologies, the product of plays” (pp. 234-235). In this perspective, intersemiotic translation evokes the subdivision of the original into various elements and the identification of components, which are then translated into another sign system.

The main difference between a film and a literary work lies in the fact that literature is fixed in a written form, while in a film the image (representation) is supported by the sound, in form of music or words. It lies on the distinction between the written and pronounced word. It is possible to divide a film

adaptation into distinctive elements, among which dialogues, the physical setting, possible voice-overs, the music, the editing, the framing, lighting, perspective, in relation to the use of human voice, also the intonation can be counted.

Considering the rich texture of intersemiotic translation, a comparative analysis of source vis-à-vis target texts requires a rational subdivision of the essential elements of the visual composition of a film along with stylistic and narrative elements of a work of fiction.

### **3. Analysis of the Film Adaptation of the Novel *The Kite Runner***

This section is spared for a comparative analysis of the novel *The Kite Runner* and its film adaptation with a concentration on the differences occurring during the intersemiotic transformation. Rather than considering the omissions and changes as what is lost in the adaptation, they are regarded as the natural outcome of the transformational process between different sign systems, and the motives behind these variations are examined.

As stated above, novel and film use different media with their own strengths and are produced in accordance with the discourse of their creators. Within this perspective, the fact that this novel was written by an Afghan-American writer, who greatly utilizes his childhood memories and experiences in his writing and his home country as the setting, whereas, the film was directed by a Swedish director who moved to the USA to study at a young age can be interpreted as the preliminary determinants of the novel vis-à-vis its film adaptation. This initial premise refers to transformation of people through varying social and political contexts, with references to being in-between (i.e. the idea of belonging nowhere and two places at the same time), migrant identity and integration. The reverberations of this preliminary distinction are further explicated in the subsequent sections of the analysis.

#### **3.1 The Plot**

The novel starts with Amir's recall of an event that happened twenty-six years ago, when he was still a boy in Afghanistan, and says that it is this incidence that made him who he is. Before this event, he lives in a big villa home in Kabul, Afghanistan, with his father called Baba. They have two servants, Ali and his son, Hassan, who are Hazaras, which is an ethnic minority with a low rank in Afghanistan. Amir and Hassan are like best friends in their own worlds, but in the society, it is out of question to regard them as friends. Kite fighting is an important tournament for children in Kabul. When a kite loses, boys chase and retrieve it, which is called "kite running". In the last tournament depicted in the novel, Amir wins and Hassan promises him to bring the last loser kite. Hassan is trapped by Wali, Kamal and sexually abused by Assef. Though witnessing this event, Amir does not do anything and Hassan does not tell him about it either. Amir pretends not to know. Nevertheless, Amir cannot get over the feeling of guilt and do something to send Hassan away. Then the story passes to March 1981, when Baba and Amir are in a truck, escaping from Kabul after Soviet invasion. They begin to live in Fremont California, Baba working at a gas station and Amir going to college after high school. Amir falls in love with the daughter of a friend of his father

and they get married. Amir and Soraya try unsuccessfully to have a baby while Amir works on his writing career.

Then Amir gets a call from Rahim Khan, who is sick and calling Amir to Pakistan. He tells Amir about the murder of Hassan and his wife and their son Sohrab, who is kept by Taliban and sexually abused. Amir risks his life and goes to Afghanistan to save Sohrab, where he has to fight with Assef, now a Taliban commander.

After a long struggle and legal procedures, Amir takes Sohrab to the USA and adopts him and grants him a new life. The novel ends with a kite running, where Amir wins and tells Sohrab he will bring the last kite for him. Nevertheless, it is implied that there will be a long time required for the boy to smile and be happy again.

The plot of the novel is well preserved in the film. Neither the course of events nor the main scenes are changed in the adaptation. As a requirement of the time limitation in the film compared to the numerous pages in the novel, some of the detailed descriptions are compensated with the opportunities of visual media, and the film does not involve all the dialogues in the novel, but the ones omitted do not constitute a main component of the plot.

It would not be wrong to state that the general discourse of the film adaptation is child-sensitive. The scenes including abuses of the children are either omitted or softened with respect to the harshness of the incidences. Firstly, the translation of the rape description of the novel into the film scene seems to be a bit censored, which is quite understandable considering the differences and addressees of two media. While the rape incidence is narrated in detail in the novel, the film does not represent the same elaboration. The vivid portrayal of this scene in the film could probably lead to scandals as an obscene image including a child. This demonstrates the governing role of varying contexts and components of different sign systems in the act of intersemiotic translation. Moreover, whereas reading a novel is an individualistic act, watching the film is a social event by nature. The latter reaches mass numbers of people simultaneously, which also doubles its effect, and makes it subject to criticism in the case of such catalysts.

The same sensitivity also holds true for the case of Sohrab and his sexual abuse by the Taliban commander, Assef. The detailed narration of the scenes and female appearance of Sohrab in the novel are not rendered with equal vividness in the film. Rather, the abusive gestures or attempts of Assef are implied in the film and the make-up of Sohrab refers to the abusive condition, but not with an exaggerated appearance as in the novel.

Furthermore, the suicide attempt of Sohrab is not carried to the cinema screen. The child commits suicide in the novel via using the razor that Amir uses to shave. This scene is omitted in the film probably as a result of the same above-mentioned limitations of the visual media. Another complete omission of the film is the child adoption process. Amir searches for a number of ways to adopt Sohrab, including both legal and illegal means. After going through struggles and long legal procedures in the embassy buildings, he could take him to the USA. Nevertheless, in the film he just takes him to the USA as if it did not pose any problems. I think the exclusion of this long and trouble some adoption process derived from political

concerns. The portrayal of the deficits of the US Legal System could pose considerable problems for the film makers. It is also possible that this was a consequence of directorial choice, time limitation, etc. Nevertheless, in my view, the inclusion of this emphasis in the film could create affinity among the addressee, considering the great numbers of immigrants in the USA and other European countries who endure great struggles to be accepted into these countries and to get a shelter.

As for another political dimension of the film, the anti-Talibanist voice is strong both in the novel and in the film. Considering the child-sensitive attitude of the director, one would expect the depictions of the violent battle scenes to be softened in the film too. Nevertheless, differently from this expectation, the director of the film does not seem to hesitate to shoot extremely violent Taliban scenes as vividly as they are depicted in the novel. This might evoke the idea that the political discourse of the author and the director corresponds to one another, leading to a faithful transformation of the political orientation of the novel into the film.

In addition, Assef's political stance and his admiration for Hitler is a significant political element of the novel. He explicitly states that he takes him as a role model, and he approves of what he has done to the Jews. His blonde hair and the statement that his mother is of German origin also empower this image. Nevertheless, there are some remarkable differences between the film and the novel considering the Nazi emphasis. To begin with, the film does not include any single reference to Assef's admiration for Hitler, and to his maternal German origin. Secondly, the appearance of the actor (i.e. Assef), also seems to be an intentional choice to eliminate these German references. He is depicted as a boy with blond hair in the novel, whereas he has brown hair in the film. This might be a result of the sensitive Hitler – Jews issue around world, and also the strong influence of the Jewish population in the media, once again manifesting the different outcomes of contexts in intersemiotic translation.

Representation of the narration of a novel in a full flesh cinema screen seems to have encountered certain censorship in the transformation process as a result of the political discourse and variation of the media. The impact of the different settings of the written and visual media are explicitly seen in the analysis of the plots.

### **3.2 The Characters**

Amir is the protagonist and the narrator of the story. He is a son of a well-known powerful businessman in Kabul. His best friend is Hassan, but he gets jealous whenever his father shows affection to Hassan. He is talented at storytelling and becomes a published novelist in the end. His biggest desire is to prove himself to his father. The feeling of guilt for not saving Hassan from being raped overwhelms his portrayal. The novel ends with his penance, when he risks his life and saves Hassan's son.

Hassan is the second important figure of the novel as the best friend and half-brother of Amir. Hassan is depicted as the symbol of loyalty, and bravery. Despite being uneducated, he is smart and is interested in reading. As a poor ethnic Hazara with a harelip, he is considered as inferior in Afghan society,

and he is the victim of racism throughout the novel. Though he thinks that Ali is his father, he is actually Baba's son. His rape scene is the catalyst constituting the turning point of the novel.

Baba is the father of Amir, and he is a well-respected businessman. He is an ambitious man getting what he wants. Nevertheless, that he hides he had a son from a Hazara woman forms a paradoxical characteristic. This might be why he stays distantly towards Amir as he cannot explicitly show his love to Hassan.

Ali is the acclaimed father of Hassan in the beginning of the novel, and also the servant of the house. He is quite humble and his characteristic features are not well defined in the novel. He is also denigrated for being an ethnic Hazara, and that he suffers from partial paralysis of his face and walks with a limp strengthen his miserable image.

Sohrab is the son of Hassan and Farzana. He serves as a substitute for Hassan in the novel. He is also an ethnic Hazara. He is also victim of sexual and physical abuse, leading to a traumatic character who almost never speaks

Rahim Khan is the close friend of Baba and also Amir. He is the one with whom Baba shares his secrets. He shows attention to Amir more closely than his father.

Assef is the antagonist of the novel. He sexually abuses both Hassan and his son Sohrab. Assef's character is the representative of the all the catalysts. He is a merciless enemy of the Hazaras, and he enjoys abusing the powerless. Once in the novel, he compares himself to Hitler, praising him.

Comparing the intersemiotic translation of the characters depicted with words in the novel with images and voices in the film, the crucial point is that "while novels have only a single entity -the character- film adaptations have both character and performer" (Stam and Raengo 2007, 22). The actors and actresses chosen for the film add another dimension to the adaptation.

The actor performing Baba is quite different in terms of appearance from his counterpart in the novel. In the novel, he has a sterner character and well-built body; whereas, in the film he has a milder, in a way more humanized appearance. Such a difference affects the powerful stance of the father figure in the novel, and diminishes the influence of the fear and respect Amir feels for his father. Nevertheless, such an appearance suits better to the resentful side of the character, reflecting the sorrow he feels for Hassan as he could not treat him as his son but as the son of his servant. This refers to the losses and gains that might occur in the case of a translation of verbal description into another medium with visual and vocal components.

There are also a few instances where some characters' representation is weakened or completely omitted. The depiction of Ali, father of Hassan, occupies more space in the novel. While in the film, he almost does not exist. There is no room for his depiction, and it is not possible to grasp any of his characteristics from the film. Also, Hassan's gypsy mother is excluded from the film. Though she is not allocated to much space in the novel, she appears and reappears for a few times and she constitutes an important crisis point with her love affair with Amir's father. In the film, on the other hand, there is no



single reference to this gypsy Hazara woman. The motives behind her exclusion remain unanswered, as there is no reference to this omission in the paratexts on this film adaptation.

Along with some character omissions, the film also misses some character particularities with respect to appearance. As an example, Hassan has a harelip in the novel, which is described in detail. It is the main issue of the verbal abuses and teases of bully child characters against Hassan. However, the child actor in the film does not have such a scar on his face. I think such an exclusion eliminates the strong portrayal of misery and pity that is felt for Hassan. In a similar vein, Hassan's father, Ali has a limping leg in the novel, whereas in the short scenes he appears, he does not seem to have any problem with his leg. His limping leg is also a matter of teases in the society, for which he is despised. The intentional decision to omit these bodily symptoms, that would otherwise empower the images of the characters, is left unanswered in the extra-textual materials either.

The examination on the intersemiotic translation of the characters portrays a bi-layered pattern with the characters appearing physically and figuratively. In the novel, the images of the characters are open to interpretation generally left to the imagination of the readers on the basis of the descriptive scenes found in the narrative. In the film, on the other hand, the physical representation of the characters is pre-determined with the appearances of the actors and actresses. Considering the limitations and distinctive features of a film compared to a novel, it is seen that certain omissions and changes are inevitable with the change of media, and the context of the production, which are compensated with the power of showing though.

### **3.3 Temporal Setting of the Novel and its Film Adaptation**

The temporal framework of *The Kite Runner* spans on four decades. The novel begins in 2001 with a flashback of Amir, the protagonist. Then it passes to the childhood of Amir and Hassan with a reference to Amir's birth in 1963. The choice of 1963 as the birth year of the protagonist might be intentional, as it is an important year for the politics of Afghanistan when the USA and Afghan relations began. The years of Amir's early childhood are depicted as happy moments with the exception of ethnic crisis. Nevertheless, when it comes to the 1970s, the course of events begins to reverse. With the Soviet invasion and the dethronement of the king, the warfare starts Afghanistan. Then the story moves to 1981 when Amir and his father Baba leaves Afghanistan to continue their lives in the USA. The 1980s and 1990s are when Amir becomes an adult in the USA and becomes a writer. These years might be read as a transformation process of an Afghani in a new country, turning into a translated man. Then it comes to 2001, when Rahim Khan gives a call to Amir to ask him to come back to Afghanistan to save Hassan's son, Sohrab. It is when the country is in a devastated condition under the control of Taliban. After a harsh struggle Amir brings Sohrab to the USA to live with his family.

The film preserves this temporal setting of the novel. It sets out with the present day and goes backwards in time with the flashbacks. The transitions between the periods are also explicitly defined in the film as in the novel. Nevertheless, with the help of visual media, the temporal setting is more vividly

represented in the film than the novel, which is quite true for people who have no clear image of how Afghanistan looks like in real life.

As for the publication date of the novel and the release of the film, the novel was published in 2003, whereas the film was released in 2007. Regarding the case of best sellers, four year-time is quite long to wait for a film adaptation so as to make use of the popularity of the novel. Among the factors that delayed the production of the film difficulties of agreeing with a film production company, getting the novel turned into a film script, finding a good director and selecting an appropriate cast might be counted. Besides, the fact that the author published a new best seller *A Thousand Splendid Suns* which was sold in millions and received numerous book awards in 2007 might have had an effect on the release year of the film. This supports the claim that the release of a film adaptation might be triggered with the proved success and increased popularity of works of arts and their authors.

### **3.4 Spatial Context of the Novel and its Film Adaptation**

The novel's spatial context spans from Kabul, Afghanistan to Pakistan and California, the USA. The space is of importance in the novel, as the ethnic and nation-oriented conflicts constitute foundational themes of the narration. The portrayal of Afghanistan is predominant in the novel. The geographic features, the weather and the people of Afghanistan are expressed in beautiful details in the novel. The same is also true for the parts taking place in the USA. The author vividly describes Afghan-American community with their struggle to hold on to life in a foreign country. The multi-faceted context of the spatial setting also dwells upon the notion of being "in-between" under discussion.

The film takes place in Kabul and Afghanistan as well. The director seems to have made good use of the visual elements in the representation of the Afghan country. With the dialogues conducted in Dari, the foreignness of the spatial setting is strengthened. Accordingly, visual objects such as smashed Coca Cola tins, blue jeans, Ford cars in Kabul or an Afghan mosque in California, the American values in Afghanistan, and Afghan values in America are skillfully implied in the film. I think this utilization of cross-fertilization is not the case for the novel as the cinema makes use of visual and verbal signs simultaneously.

As for the places of production concerning both the novel and the film, the book was written in America where the author Khalid Hosseini lived, whereas, most of the film was shot in Kashgar, China. It was one of the main criticisms against Hosseini that he wrote about Afghanistan without really knowing Afghanistan, as he left the country with his family while he was a child and did not return back before the book was written.

The same criticism also holds true for the spatial representation in the film. The film is not shot in Kabul but rather in Kashgar, sharing borders with Afghanistan. As known it is a common case for the films to be shot in different places than the adopted novelistic setting. As a case of intersemiotic translation, the source text is rendered through an illusion of reality, presenting a different country as Afghanistan in the

translated text. This is one of the areas where visual media can be manipulated to create the intended image and representation to make it as believable as its written original.

### 3.5 The Themes

The book provides a rich texture of themes. As a literary work addressing varying issues in either an implicit or explicit manner throughout the novel. Among them search for redemption, the tension of a father- son relation, the patriarchal society with a strong father figure, political context vs. individual lives, and the haunting of the past can be counted. Rape and its traumatizing effect are also prominent in the book. The harelip of Hassan, the limping leg of Ali, and the kites flying on the sky are important motives of the book as well.

Based on the analysis of the intersemiotic translation of these themes, it would not be wrong to say that the film preserves the thematic features of the novel as well. Above-outlined thematic orientations such as guilt and redemption are transferred in the film. However, the reverberations of these universal themes naturally use different media in a novel and the film, in which the former tells while the latter shows. As an example, elaborate descriptions of the relationship between the son and the father are translated into gestures, mimics in the film to reflect the same feelings. However, the motives of the novel that mainly dwell upon the physical deficiencies, abnormalities are missing in the film. The harelip of the protagonist Hassan, and the limping leg of his father are omitted in the film, which could serve as strong visual elements increasing the pitiful images of these characters. While another prevailing motive of the novel, kite-flying is well preserved and eloquently shown with the use of technology to turn images into remarkable scenes in cinema.

### 3.6 Language: *The Kite Runner* as a Site of Translation

Going beyond the scope of intersemiotic translation, the novel *The Kite Runner* and its film adaptation with the same title can also be read as a site of translation both in the figurative and literal sense. Despite the correlation between the fundamental components of the film and the novel such as the plot and the setting, the language component varies dramatically in the novel and the film.

To start with, in the novel all the dialogues take place in English, it is presented as if it was the mother tongue of the characters. Though it is one of the official languages of Afghanistan, Dari is not mentioned as a separate language in the novel. This inherently makes the novel a translated book. As the novel is set in Kabul with Afghani characters, they would naturally speak in Dari. Nevertheless, their speeches are given in English, which refers to an act of interlingual translation from Dari into English in the mind of the author. The only parts that can be inferred as the reminiscent of the foreign language are the culture specific Dari words, which are given in italics, attributing some kind of hybridity to the text.

In the movie, on the other hand, the dialogues between the characters in Afghanistan are in Dari. The only place where the characters speak English is some of the scenes in the USA. The dialogues in Dari

are accompanied with English subtitles, demonstrating the foreignness of the setting. This shows that different instruments of rendering a source text into a target text might require alterations in the translational practices.

In this instance, the prevailing language of the novel is English, and the foreignness of the setting is reflected with italicized Dari words scattered through the text. In the film, the sense foreignness is evoked with the use of Dari as a spoken language among the characters, and the very existence of English subtitles enhances the complex linguistic patterning of the context. The subtitles are a product of bi-faceted interlingual translation. Namely, the dialogues in the novel are translated into Dari, and they are back translated into English in the subtitles.

The plurality of language in the novel and the film might also be explained with reference to the personal habitus of the author. There is no reference to any Dari book written by the author in any of the paratexts. Thus, I think it is possible that he is not be competent in Dari to write a book in that language. Besides the addressee might also be decisive in the preference to write in English. Because writing in English empowers the author to address a considerable number of people around the world, making it quite accessible to the target readership.

Moreover, in this context, the author's use of the language of the foreign (the powerful), to tell about the self/ the home (the weak) might also lead to a post-colonial reading. That Hosseini as an Afghan American author writes about Afghanistan in English rather than in Dari brings forth questions on reverberations of the asymmetrical power relations on the language. The condition of Afghanistan as a colonized country for decades serves well for such an interpretation. In this instance, it can be inferred that the colonized uses the language of the colonizer to be heard.

As a post-colonial author, the preference of Hosseini to narrate his novel in English eliminates the necessity of translation in the spatial framework of its production (i.e. in the USA) and in a number of countries around the world due to the relatively universal status of English. In this case, the lack of translation at first sight does not cover the whole translational story. As an author of Afghan origin, Hosseini figuratively translates himself in an English language author with reverberations of his source that are observed in the Dari words used as organic elements of the text. It can also be argued that this self-translation bears repercussions in the thematic orientation of the novel with issues such as migration, being in-between, the search for the identification of the self (Bassnett and Trivedi, 2002, p. 12). The use of words in Dari might have been used with the intention of defamiliarizing the language to make the readers face the reality of difference, challenging the idea of standard language (Tymoczko, 2002, p. 32)

The differences in the reflection of bilingualism between the film and the novel appear as a direct result of the changes in the media. The utilization of subtitles enables the director to shoot the film in accordance with the setting, taking place in Afghanistan. In other words, while it was not possible for the author to write the book in Dari and use footnotes for back-translations, it was possible for the director to shoot most scenes of the film in Dari, and accompany them with English subtitles.

Furthermore, it is possible to come up with instances of intralingual translation in the novel. There are several examples where the educated protagonist Amir explains some high-level English words to the uneducated protagonist Hassan, which can well be depicted as intralingual translation. However, these cases do not appear in the film adaptation, as the language of the protagonists are changed as Dari in the scenes taking place in Kabul.

In addition, transformation of the life in Kabul can also be interpreted as a form of figurative translation. With the invasion of the Soviet Union, Kabul is transformed into a city of warfare, where people used to live happily. The premises of life are written and this creative transposition (not necessarily in an affirmative sense) is brought about by Taliban, which claims to shape Afghanistan and manipulate the country according to their interests. Also, their attempt to get rid of the foreign elements such as ethnic minority Hazaras, the USA referent objects and any reminiscent of the Soviet might be inferred as a quest for the pure original, which is the true Afghani people, owners of Afghanistan according to their claims.

The spatial setting of the novel also goes through a transformation in the novel. The protagonist leads a happy and wealthy life in Kabul, which is turned into a poor one in the suburbs of the USA. The change in the spaces brings about new life styles and the struggle of compromising the traditions of Afghani identity with the requirements of new modern life in the USA. The trial of carrying over the components of the home country evokes the idea of transferring the elements of the original (home country) into the target (the USA) with the intention of saving what is peculiar to the source.

With these figurative instances of translation, the book emerges as a site of varying translational practices, which adds to the diversity of its intersemiotic translation in the film adaptation.

### **3.7 The Style**

Style is one of the most difficult components of a literary analysis and searching for the traces of these stylistic features in another sign system is ever harder. There are not distinctive stylistic elements of Khalid Hosseini's writing. It can be defined as plain, making extensive use of descriptive language with a focus on motion. Though he predominantly uses simple English in the novel, his use of some foreign words in Dari adds hybridity to his authorial language. He also frequently applies repetitions, flashbacks and flashforwards as techniques to form his non-linear narration. As for the narrative voice of the novel, it is told in the first person from the perspective of the protagonist. As the main actor of the course of events in the book, he portrays an omnipotent narrator. The tone of the novel is rueful, addressing to the tenderest feelings of the people with images, sudden exclamations, or ironic turns in the attitudes of the characters.

The film is quite successful with respect to the transfer of this rueful tone, which easily makes its spectators cry. With the flash-forwards and flashbacks the dynamic feature of the novel is also preserved. Nevertheless, it is not true for the narrative voice. There is no narrator in the film. Rather than the explanations of the protagonist, which is telling, the director seems to have chosen the power of showing. This exclusion in the film also emancipates the audience from the interpretation of the narrator, making some of the scenes more open-ended.

Furthermore, the hybrid-like language of the novel goes under change in the film. Rather than inclusion of foreign words into English dialogues as in the novel, the language Dari is used in the film. That is, differently from the novel, the foreign language is not implied, but explicitly made use of, which completes the natural setting for the film taking place in Afghanistan. As an advantage of the visual media accompanied with the vocal mediums, the tone of the voices, the intonations are all complementary elements of the register used in the film. Last but not the least, the use of musical elements in the film including successful selections of traditional Afghan music enhances the foreignness, the sense of being an outsider, emphasized in the film.

### **3.8 Tracing the Translational Discourse in the Paratextual and Metatextual Elements**

The discourse on the film adaptation of the novel *The Kite Runner* is mostly based on the notion of fidelity. Most of the critics agree on the point that the adaptation is a faithful one, though what they mean with “faithful” might vary. In most of these critics, the film is defined as an effective and straightforward adaptation, a faithful rendition.

Considering the influence of political events in the characters’ developments and transformations, it would not be wrong to claim that politics determines the course of the story in the novel. The political unrest in the country leads to the migration of the characters, bringing about discussions on integrity to a foreign country and negotiation of the conflicting values, traditions.

The director of the film, Foster emphasizes the toughness of making a film on a tender issue such as sexual abuse of children, in addition to its political orientation, anti-Taliban view. He defines this film as an “issue movie” referring to the motivation behind its production. In this regard, Foster also elaborates on the difficulties the film crew endured from the very beginning, starting with their search for native child actors in the war-zone Afghanistan, with whom communication was carried out via translators (Bernstein, 2007).

There are several issues expressed in the criticisms, which prevailing -as above outlined- concern political premises. In one of the articles, the director Marc Foster is criticized for exaggerating the status of Kabul before and after Soviet invasion, claiming that the film manipulated the image of the country under the impact of the Russian rule (Gonzales, 2007).

In another article on the adaptation, the critic concentrates on the cinematic competence of the director and praises Foster for his meticulous instrumentalization of lyrical kite-flying sequences, use of Chinese locations for their similarity to Afghan setting, and the naturalistic performances elicited from the child performers (Scheck, 2007).

Among the extratextual materials on the film, the child actors and their physical and psychological well-being appear as a prevailing point of concentration. There are many references to the worries of the child actors’ families for the safety of their children in Afghanistan, as the country had witnessed the murder of some of the actors for taking part in films, representing Afghanistan and Taliban negatively. These concerns preliminarily governed the shooting of the film. That is why, the movie was not shot in Kabul,

Afghanistan but in Kashgar, China. Besides, the release date of the film was postponed so as to provide time to these child actors to leave the country for a while (Bernstein, 2007).

Moreover, the existence of sensitive issues such as sexual abuse on children in the narration emerge as a matter of concern for the actors of the film. The reception of the film within the traditional social structures adds to the complexity of the issue for the actors, taking place in these scenes. As an example, the child actor performing “Hassan” in the film, expresses his worries about what his friends would think about the rape scenes in an article in the *London Times* (2007) as follows: “I want to continue making films and be an actor but the rape scene upset me because my friends will watch it and I won’t be able to go outside any more. They will think I was raped.” This demonstrates how the discourse on a film might go beyond the political life and directly impact the psychological and social well-being of the individuals.

In addition to the rape scene constituting one of the main catalysts, the ethnic references in the film has also been a matter of discussion. In the film, the Hazara, an ethnic community in Afghanistan, are explicitly disguised, seen inferior, there are even statements that support their ethnic cleansing. The families of the Afghan child actors are concerned with the accusations for making Hazara look bad in the eye of the world by fellow members of Hazara population. The fact that the violence against the Hazara has been true for more than a century in Afghanistan and they have been subject to cruel treatment under the control of Taliban because of the Shiite Muslim faith (Nelson, 2008) does not change the anxiety of actors and their families because of the power of discourse over the reality.

What is more, the publication of the book and the release of the film might provide insights about the production line of the intersemiotic translation. The book has been published in 70 countries, translated into more than 60 languages since it first came out in 2003 (Thorpe, 2012), making it a worldwide known book, increasing its impact on the of image-making of Afghanistan. That it has sold more than millions makes it a “bestseller” and a popular book, enabling it to reach millions of people. The same is also true for the film, which gained a spectacular success in the cinema. Despite its positive and extensive reception in Europe, and the USA, it is not possible to say much about its reception in Afghanistan.

The book is not officially published in Afghanistan. In an interview with Hosseini, he states that his work hasn’t officially been printed in Afghanistan, though, pirate copies are available. The book has been officially published in Iran, but as there are not any copyright agreements between Iran and the USA, the publication was done out of the control of Hosseini’s publishing agency. The territorial closeness of Iran and Afghanistan has made it possible for these pirate-unofficial publications of Persian edition of the book to reach Kabul as well as its English editions. In this vein, Hosseini also mentions of an incidence in which a book seller apologized from him for selling a pirate copy and said “Your book is doing really well; we’re very happy with it” (Hosseini, 2007) during his visit to Kabul. This instance demonstrates the role of social and political context on the reception of a novel, which breaks the official borders and linguistic differences.

The statements of the bookseller that Hosseini narrates also reveals the discrepancy between the official attitude, associated with the state, and the individuals’ reaction in the society toward the same literary work. Namely, while it is criticized, censored by high authorities of the rule of power, it might be welcomed

by its very citizens. As for the release of the film in Afghanistan, unfortunately I could not find any traces of information. Based on the information available on the dissemination of the book in the country, I think it was probably not shown on the cinema, but pirate copies might have circulated in the society.

Furthermore, the author Hosseini (2007) concentrates upon the increased visibility of Islam in *The Kite Runner* as a Hollywood film. He claims that the mosque scenes are the very first examples where an Islamic praying practice is vividly portrayed and not followed by a suicide bombing in the cinema screen. On this point, I think the discourse of the author is illusionary and over-optimistic. The adaptation of his film rather empowers the link created between Islam and violence. The radically violent scenes depicting the conceptions of Taliban, which claims to serve Islam, confirms the negative Muslim image created in the West.

The political orientation of the novel is not limited with the theme of the narration. The nation-bound focus of his novels and his affiliation with Afghanistan brought Hosseini recognition in the political sphere. He was named as Goodwill Ambassador to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Refugee Agency in 2006 (Thorpe 2012). With this mission he has visited Afghanistan several times and he was appointed as United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) Goodwill Ambassador in 2013. After one of his visits he states that "I knew more of what to expect. Some things in Afghanistan are better compared with 2003: there are more kids in school, the economy is better, there are improvements in health and infrastructure. But things have also slid back in some way. Obviously, there is a war in the southeast and fighting between the Taliban and the coalition, and an exponential rise in the number of suicide bombings" (Kay 2007). Besides, there is a NGO foundation called "The Khaled Hosseini Foundation", providing humanitarian assistance for the people of Afghanistan. It works with UNHCR with the aim of building shelters for refugee families and providing economic opportunities, education, and healthcare for women and children in Afghanistan.

These initiations create an image of Hosseini, who serves for the benefit of his home country with the power he gained by telling about it, and implying the idea that he knows Afghanistan very well, and has a lot to tell about it in his subsequent works on it.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The study on the intersemiotic translation and discourse of the worldwide best seller novel *The Kite Runner* and its film adaptation has yielded resourceful insights with respect to translation.

First, as the above-given detailed analysis demonstrates the film adaptation of *The Kite Runner* can be defined as a faithful rendition, preserving fundamental themes and motives of the novel as well as its temporal and spatial setting. The existence of some omissions or alterations has been explained in terms of the requirements of the differences between written and visual media as well as discursive motives.

Secondly, it is shown that the differences between the media used in a novel and a film inevitably necessitated alterations in the transfer process of the source text into a different sign system. It is highlighted that both have their own strengths and tools to transfer the intended message as well as their own limitations



which can be temporal, spatial, stylistic, etc. In addition, it is expressed that the non-linear correspondence of the units between the novel and the film hinders the researcher making straightforward comparisons between the source and the target, differently from interlingual translations.

Thirdly, this study provides a scheme of analysis for intersemiotic translation. In this regard, the foundational premises of the Adaptation Studies are revisited and it is highlighted that an intersemiotic analysis is to go beyond discussions on fidelity. To explore the underlying motives behind the changes between the source novel and its adaptation, analytical tools of Critical Discourse Analysis are instrumentalized. This approach also enables the examination of the intersemiotic units in a wider network of relations with reference to ideology, power relations, and the impact of political and social context on the transfer process. Moreover, scrutiny on the novel and the film as products of a discourse has also provided practical grounds to explicate certain authorial and directorial choices in relation to their contexts of production.

This study has also revealed that the film adaptation of a novel on a tender issue such as child abuse intentionally or unintentionally leads to some form of censorship. It is argued that it might not be equally possible to show everything in a film that is already told in a novel. In other words, it is seen that showing on a cinema screen might not be possible for some instances, while they could be told in vivid details in a narrative of a literary text, revealing how the media is decisive in the transfer and adaptation process.

Furthermore, the design of the study, elaborating on a film adaptation from a translational point of view, brings forth the linguistic transfer as a foundational premise. In this regard, it is observed that intersemiotic translation can lead to alterations in the linguistic components of the source vis-à-vis the target. The novel uses English in the novel as the language of narration and scattered Dari words provide a sense of foreignness and reflect the Afghani setting of the narrative framing. While the film uses Dari as the language of dialogues between the characters and English subtitles create the intended sense of foreignness, exemplifying a cross-fertilization between different mediums of artistic production.

The linguistic hybridity of the novel is also correlated to the postcolonial writing. In this vein, the personal habitus of the author suits well to the reading of a postcolonial author, which can be interpreted as a translated man, writing in the language of the colonizer to tell about the colonized.

Besides, translation emerges as a form of figurative rendering in the case of *The Kite Runner*. I suggest to interpret the transformation of society, the characters as well as the spatial and temporal settings as forms of translation in which the former constitutes the source text and the altered version represents the target in accordance with the binary oppositions of the prevailing translational analysis.

As a final remark, the initiatives started by Khaled Hosseini such as the organization called Khaled Hosseini Foundation, and that he is Afghanistan goodwill ambassador of UHNCR have manifested how the discourse of a novel might go beyond the literary circles. In this case, the politics stands out as an influential tool of image-building and, in my view, inevitably affects the reception of the existing and forthcoming novels of Hosseini on Afghanistan around the world along with their adaptations in the digital media.

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