

A Study of Conflict Resolution Strategies in Translation Prefaces

Marzieh Maddahi* 

PhD, Translation Studies, Translation Studies
Department, Allameh Tabataba'i University,
Tehran, Iran

Abstract

In the aftermath of conflict, the role of translation extends into the realm of conflict resolution. This study examines how translation prefaces address conflict resolution in the context of post-revolutionary Iran following the Iran-Iraq War, focusing on the resolution strategies employed. To achieve this, criterion sampling was used to select three English books on the Iran-Iraq War, originally written from Iraqi or Other perspectives and translated into Persian by Marz-o-Boom Publications. Data were collected from the prefaces of these translations, emphasizing their treatment of the war and the contentious themes in the source texts. Using Salama-Carr's (2007) and Webne Behrman's (1998) definitions of conflict, conflict cases were identified and categorized based on Thomas and Kilmann's (1974) conflict resolution model. The findings indicate that the competing strategy was predominantly employed (44.4%–54.6%), reflecting strong assertiveness in promoting Iranian state perspectives. The compromising strategy was used to a moderate extent (18.6%–34.4%), indicating some engagement in negotiation, while the collaborating strategy ranged from 18.1% to 33.4%, reflecting fluctuating openness to diverse viewpoints. The accommodating strategy appeared only once (2.3%), highlighting a reluctance to embrace alternative perspectives, while the avoiding strategy was entirely absent, suggesting a deliberate effort to confront the complexities of the conflict. Overall, the findings reveal a pattern of using collaboration within a competitive framework as a nuanced approach to conflict resolution in sensitive translation contexts. This strategy demonstrates a strong commitment to constructive dialogue, enriches the discourse on the conflict, and enhances readers' understanding of its multifaceted nature.

Keywords: Conflict resolution, Other, Self, Iran-Iraq War

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*Corresponding author: maddahi_mar@yahoo.com

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Introduction

In our contemporary global landscape, the intricate relationship between translation and conflict has garnered significant academic attention, particularly in the context of post-conflict societies. The Iran-Iraq War, which lasted from 1980 to 1988 is considered one of the longest and deadliest conflicts of the 20th century. This war not only resulted in profound human and material losses but also left a lasting impact on the political and cultural fabric of the region (Mosaffa, 2018). The narratives surrounding this conflict are multifaceted, often reflecting divergent political views and historical interpretations. As such, translation agents working in post-war Iran usually find themselves at the intersection of these narratives, tasked with the responsibility of conveying complex and often contentious themes to target audiences.

A substantial body of literature exists on the notion of conflict in the field of Translation Studies (e.g., Baker, 2006; Salama-Carr, 2007). Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, these studies mainly examine the role of translation in wartime, conflict, and peace efforts, with scholars focusing on specific conflict situations across various contexts as it is believed that translation plays a crucial role not only in conveying information but also in shaping narratives and influencing public perception during and after conflicts.

Baker (2006) highlights the agency of translators, emphasizing how their choices can shape narratives and influence the framing of events within conflict scenarios. She sheds light on the ways translation could participate in the institution of war as well as the ways translators could circulate or resist narratives that create the intellectual and moral environment for violent conflicts. Many scholars have also engaged with Baker's theory, applying her analytical model to various corpora (e.g., Yalsharzeh, Barati, & Hesabi, 2019; Khalili & Mollanazar, 2020). They mainly aim to demonstrate how different reframing strategies have been used in their examined translations to serve political and ideological functions in guiding reader interpretations within a particular context, such as the Iranian context.

Salama-Carr (2007) further explores the ethical responsibilities of translators, arguing that their work can either contribute to peacebuilding efforts or exacerbate tensions, underscoring the profound implications that translation choices can have on public perception and understanding of conflicts. She asserts that the ethical responsibility of the translator and the interpreter may take various forms, which is not merely limited to the familiar dominions of professional ethics and good practice, as it also entails the translator's and the interpreter's awareness, testimony, and open ideological commitment and involvement.

The dynamics of translation also extend into conflict resolution, where understanding the strategies employed by translators can unveil how narratives are crafted and contested in sensitive contexts. Researchers have explored the multifaceted nature of conflicts, investigating their origins, manifestations, and resolution strategies (e.g., Tang, 2007; Pérez, 2007). Iranian scholars, in particular, have offered insights into the adopted conflict resolution strategies, especially in the context of historical events such as the Iran-Iraq War (Mollanazar & Maddahi, 2017; Maddahi & Mollanazar, 2021), providing a deeper understanding of the implications of conflict resolution strategies for both national and global contexts.

However, the existing body of research addressing the Iranian context has not investigated how translation prefaces (translators' or annotators' prefaces) approach conflict resolution in the context of post-revolutionary Iran after the Iran-Iraq War. None has focused on the adopted resolution strategies. This suggests a pressing need for such analysis, particularly as Iran continues to face a complex array of conflicts, emphasizing the necessity for translators to navigate an environment rife with sensitivity and divergent political views. The implications of translation in such a context are

profound, as translators have the power to influence perceptions and understanding among diverse cultural and political groups. As they engage with texts that reflect the narratives surrounding these conflicts, the strategies they employ become crucial in determining how these narratives are interpreted and understood by target audiences.

This study aims to fill this existing gap by examining how translation prefaces approach conflict resolution in post-Iran-Iraq War, with a particular focus on the resolution strategies employed. Specifically, it utilizes Salama-Carr's (2007) and Webne-Behrman's (1998) definitions of conflict, along with Thomas and Kilmann's (1974) typology of conflict resolution strategies to analyze the conflict resolution strategies articulated in the Persian translation prefaces of a body of English books addressing the Iran-Iraq War from the Iraqi or Other perspective. This investigation will enrich our understanding of the interplay between conflict and translation, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on conflict resolution in sensitive translation contexts.

Methodology

This study is a corpus-based, descriptive-explanatory type. For conducting the study, criterion sampling was employed to select three English books along with their Persian translations that were available in the market of Iran, with criteria including their being originally written in English on the Iran-Iraq War from Iraqi or Other perspective, and being translated into English by Marz-o-Boom Publications (affiliated with Revolutionary Guards Sacred Defense Documentation and Research Center). The translations were assumed to reflect the Iranian official perspectives on the war. Table 1 presents the bibliographical information of the English books and their translations.

Table 1. Corpus of the Study

No.	English Source Texts	Persian Translations
1	Cordesman, A. H., & Wagner, A. R. (1990). <i>The lessons of modern war, volume II: The Iran-Iraq War</i> . Westview Press.	Cordesman, A. H., & Wagner, A. R. (2011a). <i>Dars-hā-ye jang-e modern: Jang-e Irān va eraāq</i> (Jeld-e 1) [<i>The lessons of modern war, volume II: The Iran-Iraq War</i>]. (H. Yekta, Trans.). Marz-o-Boom (Original work published 1990).
		Cordesman, A. H., & Wagner, A. R. (2011b). <i>Dars-hā-ye jang-e modern: Jang-e Irān va eraāq</i> (Jeld-e 2) [<i>The lessons of modern war, volume II: The Iran-Iraq War</i>]. (H. Yekta, Trans.). Marz-o-Boom (Original work published 1990).
2	Joyner, C. C. (1990). <i>The Persian Gulf War: Lessons for strategy, law, and diplomacy</i> . Connecticut: Greenwood.	Joyner, C. C. (2011). <i>Darsh āyi az r āhbord-e hoqooq-e diplom āsi dar jang-e Irān va eraāq</i> [<i>The Persian Gulf War: Lessons for strategy, law, and diplomacy</i>]. (D. Olamayi Koopayi, Trans.). Marz-o-Boom (Original work published 1990).
3	Willemse, M. (2006). <i>The most powerful partner in crime: How the United States took sides in the Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988</i> [Master's thesis, University of Utrecht].	Willemse, M. (2013). <i>Qaviytarin sharik-e jorm: Mavāze'e jānb-dārāneh-ye āmrkā dar jang-e Irān va Erāq</i> [<i>The most powerful partner in crime: How the United States took sides in the Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988</i>] [Master's thesis, University of Utrecht]. (M. A. Khorrami, Trans.). Marz-o-Boom. (Original work published 2006).

All the translations that comprise the corpus enjoy an almost lengthy translator's or annotator's preface. To be more precise, the Persian translations of *The Persian Gulf War: Lessons for Strategy, law, and Diplomacy*, and *The Lessons of Modern War, Volume II: The Iran-Iraq War* have prefaces

written on them by Shamkhani and Alaei, respectively. It is also noteworthy that *The Lessons of Modern War, Volume II: The Iran-Iraq War* has been translated into two volumes, and Alaei has written a separate preface on each, which will also be analyzed individually in this paper. However, the preface available in *The Most Powerful Partner in Crime: How the United States took sides in the Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988* is written by the translator himself. This study treats them in a similar way. The data for the current study came from these prefaces.

Data analysis included a content and thematic analysis of the translators' or annotators' prefaces based on Hsieh's (2014) theory of translation that metaphorizes translation as conflict (dispute) resolution to propose that translators assume the role of dispute resolvers between cultures and/or languages. It also relied on Thomas-Kilmann's (1974) proposed analytical model for the classification of conflict resolution strategies to review and classify translators' and annotators' applied strategies of conflict resolution.

Based on Thomas-Kilmann's (1974) model, the following operational definitions were provided to detect the textual manifestation of each conflict resolution strategy in the corpus under study:

1. Competing strategy: statements that are assertive and prioritize the interests of the state of Iran over the other.
2. Compromising strategy: statements that acknowledge both states have different priorities and need to make concessions and find a middle ground.
3. Accommodating strategies: statements that prioritize the needs and preferences of the other state over the state of Iran.
4. Collaborating strategy: statements that are inclusive and seek to find a mutually beneficial solution for both countries, addressing the concerns and benefits of both states.
5. Avoiding strategy: Statements that deflect or avoid conflict altogether to maintain peace.

The prefaces were examined to identify their treatment of the Iran-Iraq War and conflict cases (based on Webne-Behrman's (1998) definition) in the source texts. The collected data was then analyzed and the conflict resolution strategies were classified based on Thomas-Kilmann's model (1974).

Data Analysis

A sample of the data analysis, featuring one example for each strategy used in the prefaces, is provided here. Additionally, a separate table presents the frequency of conflict resolution strategies used in each preface, offering insights into the most or least frequently employed strategies in addressing the war and managing conflict cases, ultimately addressing the research question.

Collaborating Strategy

The following example is a case of collaborating strategy from *The Persian Gulf War: Lessons for Strategy, Law, and Diplomacy*, where the annotator reflects on the key conflictual elements of one of the main English book chapters.

Example 1:

فصل سیزدهم (ایران و عراق و مذاکرات آتش‌بس) که مبین خواسته‌های بلندپروازانه عراق در طول مذاکرات است، اطلاعات و مطالب مفیدی دارد. (Shamkhani, 2011, p. 19)

English Translation: Chapter Thirteen (Iran and Iraq, and ceasefire talks) represents Iraq's ambitious demands during the talks and has useful information (Shamkhani, 2011, p. 19).

Analysis: In this sentence, first the annotator appreciates the useful information included in Chapter Thirteen of the book. For doing so, he shows his openness, and willingness to listen to the Other's narrations of the events, and his attempt to build trust. However, he acutely addresses Iraq's demands as ambitious and clarifies his critical stance towards Iraq's demands during the ceasefire talks. It seems like adopting a win-win approach and using the collaborating strategy.

Competing Strategy

The second example demonstrates how the translator has used competing strategy in his preface on *The Most Powerful Partner in Crime: How the United States Took Sides in the Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988* to highlight Iran's unique ideological stance during the Islamic Revolution.

Example 2:

انقلاب اسلامی ایران در جهان دوقطبی حاکم در دوران جنگ سرد میان دو ابرقدرت و در دنیای مادی‌گرایانه دو اردوگاه سوسیالیسم و کاپیتالیسم، صدایی دگرگونه بود و اصول، ارزش‌ها و اهداف آن با نظم حاکم بر روابط بین‌المللی هم‌خوانی نداشت. ایران که خود را از اردوگاه غرب رها کرده و قدرت حاکم بر آن را به چالش کشیده بود، به اردوگاه شرق نیز نپیوسته و با محور قرار دادن شعار «نه شرقی، نه غربی»، جمهوری اسلامی را بر پایه آن بنیان نهاده بود. (Khorrami, 2013, p. 10)

English Translation: *The Islamic Revolution of Iran, when the world was bipolar and the Cold War existed between the superpowers and the materialist world was governing the two camps of socialism and capitalism, was a different voice and its principles, values, and objectives were not compatible with the established order in the international relations. Iran, which had liberated itself from the West and challenged its governing power, had not joined the camp of the East either. It established the Islamic Republic by focusing on the motto "Neither the East, Nor the West" (Khorrami, 2013, p. 10).*

Analysis: The translator's emphasis on the Islamic Revolution's different voice, principles, values, and objectives which have been incompatible with the established order in international relations is a signal of using the competing strategy. The translator does not show any interest in adopting a relationship orientation or yielding. He directly addresses the differences.

Compromising Strategy

Example three illustrates how the annotator has employed compromising strategy in his preface TO the translation (the first volume) of *The Lessons of Modern War, Volume II: The Iran-Iraq War* in discussing the diverse perspectives of scholars and writers on the Iran-Iraq War.

Example 3:

پژوهندگان و نویسندگان در نوشته‌های خود با توجه به «نوع علائق»، «چارچوب فکری»، «زمان تدوین»، «نوشته‌ار گفتمان غالب بر عصر تدوین نوشته‌ار» و احیاناً «وابستگی‌هایی که به مراکز مختلف قدرت» داشته‌اند، با دیدگاه‌های مختلفی به جنگ ایران و عراق نگریسته‌اند. «انگیزه» آنان در تألیف کتاب‌های جنگ و همچنین «نوع تخصص» آنها موجب شده است تا نوشته‌هایشان از دیدگاه‌های مختلف تاریخی، نظامی، سیاسی، حقوقی، ژئوپلیتیک، فرهنگی و ... تدوین و ارائه گردد. به همین دلیل است که تفسیر رویدادهای جنگ از دیدگاه مورخی که از حوزه علم اقتصاد به آن می‌نگرد با تحلیل‌گری که دارای دانش نظامی است و نیز با مورخی که از حوزه علم سیاست و یا جغرافیا موضوع را بررسی می‌کند، تفاوت‌های عمده‌ای دارد. هر کدام از آنها یک «واقعیت معین» را ممکن است متفاوت ببینند و به صورت مختلفی مورد بررسی و ارزیابی قرار دهند. بدیهی است «واقعیت جنگ» موضوعی پیچیده و بغرنج است و هر پژوهنده‌ای بر اساس «فهم و

درک»، «پیش‌فرض‌ها» و «روش تحلیلی» خود به بررسی رخ داده‌های جنگ می‌پردازد و تفسیر و تبیینی را ارائه می‌دهد. گرچه معمولاً «حقیقت تاریخی» ثابت و یکسان است، اما معرفت آن، برای افراد مختلف، متفاوت است. تا زمانی که مورخان و تحلیل‌گران گرفتار محدودیت‌های اطلاعاتی و معرفت شناختی‌اند، نمی‌توان انتظار داشت تا به عمق حقیقت یک واقعیت تاریخی دست یابند. بنابراین توجه به تنوع نگرش‌ها و دیدگاه‌های مختلف نویسندگان می‌تواند خوانندگان را از پیش‌داوری در مورد جنگ برحذر دارد و به آنها دید جامع‌تری در خصوص یکی از مهم‌ترین تحولات معاصر خاورمیانه بدهد. پس لازم است تا از نوشته‌های مختلف استقبال شود، ولی در استفاده از آنها با عنایت به آیه «فَبَشِّرْ عِبَادَ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُ» (زمر: ۱۷ و ۱۸) اقدام کرد. (Alaei, 2011a, p. 28)

English Translation: Scholars and writers in their writings have seen the Iran-Iraq War from different perspectives according to their type of interest, conceptual framework, time in which they have done their writing job, the dominant discourse at the time, and possibly their attachment to various power centers. Their motivation in writing war books as well as their specialty have caused the formulation and presentation of their works from different historical, military, political, legal, geopolitical, and cultural perspectives. Thus, there are major differences between the analysis of the war events from the perspective of a historian looking at it from the field of economy, with analysts who have military knowledge as well as with historians of science politics, or geography. Each of them might see a given fact and investigate and assess it differently. Obviously, the reality of war is a complex subject and each researcher investigates and explains it based on his knowledge and understanding, assumptions, and analytical method. Though the historical truth is usually fixed, its perceived knowledge is different for different people. As long as historians and analysts are caught in intelligence and epistemological limitations, they cannot be expected to reach the truth depth of a historical fact. So, paying attention to the diversity of attitudes and different views of the authors, one should warn readers of pre-judging the war, and give them a broader perspective on one of the most important contemporary Middle East developments. So, it is necessary to welcome different writings, but they should be used concerning the verse "Give good tidings to My servants, those who listen to the word, and follow the best" (Az-Zumar: 17 and 18) (Alaei, 2011a, p. 28).

Analysis: The segments that are underlined in this paragraph such as the complexity of the reality of the war, and the diversity of attitudes toward its analysis, warning the readers of pre-judging the war, and giving them a broader perspective could be the signs of the compromising strategy. The annotator does admit that there are different perspectives towards the Iran-Iraq War events, some of which may not be fair. Thus, one should not pre-judge them but should be open to them, and benefit from them.

Accommodating Strategy

The last example shows how the annotator has used accommodating strategy in his preface on the translation (the first volume) of *The Lessons of Modern War, Volume II: The Iran-Iraq War* to emphasize harmony with the other party.

Example 4:

از طرفی، از زمان نگارش این کتاب، حدود بیست سال می‌گذرد؛ در این مدت اطلاعات جدیدی در مورد وقایع و واقعیت‌های جنگ منتشر شده است که می‌تواند نگاه و تحلیل نویسنده و خواننده را دگرگون سازد. اسناد و مدارکی که امروزه با گذشت نزدیک به سی سال از آغاز جنگ ایران و عراق، در اختیار پژوهش‌گران قرار گرفته است، می‌تواند زوایای بیش‌تری از ابعاد مختلف جنگ را روشن کند. بر همین اساس می‌توان گفت که پژوهش و تحقیق درباره رویدادهای تاریخی بی‌پایان است و با گذشت زمان می‌توان از یک واقعه تاریخی، تصویرهایی روشن‌تر ارائه کرد. (Alaei, 2011a, p. 34)

English Translation: On the other hand, almost twenty years have passed since this book was written; in the meantime, new information has been released about the events and realities of the war that can change the opinion and analysis of the writer and the readers. Evidence that today, nearly thirty

years after the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War, is available to the researchers, could shed light on more aspects of different dimensions of the war. Accordingly, one can say that research on historical events is endless, and clearer images of any historical event emerge as time passes (Alaei, 2011a, p. 34).

Analysis: In this paragraph, acknowledging the authors' limited access to the documents and information at the time of writing the book, the annotator accepts it as an excuse for their incomplete covering of the events of the war which he had previously criticized and considered as a conflicting point. Thus, the annotator has adopted the accommodating strategy.

Results

The analysis of the data indicates that all prefaces, with the exception of the one accompanying the second volume of *The Lessons of Modern War, Volume II: The Iran-Iraq War*, share several overarching themes. A closer examination reveals that the observed variations largely arise from the distinct characteristics of the respective source texts. Regarding conflict resolution, these prefaces lay the groundwork for addressing the existing conflicts within the translational context. They provide a concise history of the Iran-Iraq War, elucidate the causes of the conflict, delineate the cultural, ideological, and political stances of the involved parties, and offer commentary on the book's content to facilitate the reader's comprehension.

In contrast, the preface to the second volume of the translation is limited in scope, concentrating primarily on the content of chapters nine through fifteen. It offers only brief commentary on each chapter, lacking the broader thematic engagement characteristic of the other prefaces. This suggests that the entirety of this preface could have been integrated into that of the first volume, given its narrower focus and limited contribution to the thematic discourse.

Table 2 presents the results of the statistical analysis of the translators' or annotators' prefaces across the books. As illustrated in the table, a combination of conflict resolution strategies has been employed by the translators and annotators, likely aimed at maintaining the conflict at a level where diverse perspectives can be effectively articulated. Among these strategies, *competing* strategy emerges as the most frequently employed, while *avoiding* strategy is the least utilized in all the examined texts. Notably, the strategy of *accommodating* is absent from the prefaces, except for its minimal occurrence (2.3%) in *The Lessons of Modern War, Volume II: The Iran-Iraq War-1*.

Table 2. Conflict Resolution Strategies in Translators' or Annotators' Prefaces

Book Titles	<i>The Persian Gulf War: Lessons for strategy, law and diplomacy</i>		<i>The most powerful partner in crime: How the United States took sides in the Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988</i>		<i>The lessons of modern war, volume II: The Iran-Iraq War-1</i>		<i>The lessons of modern war, volume II: The Iran-Iraq War-2</i>	
Strategy	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Avoiding	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Accommodating	-	-	-	-	1	2.3	-	-
Competing	4	44.4	6	54.6	21	48.8	4	44.4
Compromising	2	22.2	3	27.3	8	18.6	3	34.4
Collaborating	3	33.4	2	18.1	13	30.3	2	22.2
Total	9	100	11	100	43	100	9	100

Discussion

The findings indicate that, with the exception of the preface accompanying the second volume of *The Lessons of Modern War, Volume II: The Iran-Iraq War*, the analyzed prefaces share overarching themes. Variations between them can largely be attributed to the distinct characteristics of the source texts. These prefaces serve a pivotal role in addressing conflict resolution within the translational context. They provide readers with a concise history of the Iran-Iraq War, explore the root causes of the conflict, outline the cultural, ideological, and political positions of the involved parties, and offer interpretative commentary on the content of the texts to enhance understanding.

The preface to the second volume of *The Lessons of Modern War* diverges from this pattern. Its limited scope focuses exclusively on chapters nine through fifteen, offering brief commentary on each chapter without engaging in the broader thematic discourse evident in the other prefaces. This narrower focus diminishes its contribution to the overarching narrative, suggesting that its content might have been better integrated into the preface of the first volume to achieve greater thematic coherence.

The statistical analysis, summarized in Table 2, further highlights the conflict resolution strategies employed in the prefaces. Translators and annotators have utilized a combination of strategies, likely aiming to manage the conflicts in a way that facilitates the articulation of diverse perspectives. Among these strategies, *competing* is the most frequently used, while *avoiding* is the least employed. The strategy of *accommodating* is notably absent. This suggests a general preference for engaging directly with conflicts rather than yielding to opposing perspectives.

Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of prefaces in shaping the readers' engagement with translated texts, particularly in contexts involving politically and ideologically charged content. By employing various conflict resolution strategies, translators and annotators navigate the complexities of representation and interpretation, ensuring that multiple perspectives are preserved and accessible.

The absence of *accommodating* strategies in most prefaces reflects a deliberate approach to engage with contentious ideas rather than concede to alternative viewpoints. Furthermore, the thematic inconsistencies observed in the second volume of *The Lessons of Modern War* underline the importance of maintaining coherence in paratextual elements to enhance the interpretative framework offered to readers.

Overall, this research underscores the significance of analyzing paratextual components, such as prefaces, to better understand the strategies and decisions underlying the translation of sensitive and contentious material. Future studies could build on these findings by exploring how these strategies influence readers' perceptions and interpretations of translated texts.

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