

Beyond Text: Multimodal Translation in the Persian Localization of *Modern Art*

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Abstract

This study investigates the localization of the rulebook of the board game *Modern Art* into its Persian version, by focusing on multimodal translation. Taylor's (2016) framework was employed to examine multimodal translation of the rulebook by focusing on four types of elements, being linguistic, semiotic, cultural, and narrative. To analyze linguistic changes, translation techniques proposed by L. Molina and A. Hurtado Albir (2002) were used, and the findings indicate that reduction, adaptation, and amplification were the most frequently used techniques. Regarding semiotic changes, the matrix proposed by Kostelnick and Roberts (2011) was applied, and the results revealed significant changes, such as modifications in images and the use of exclamation marks. Cultural analysis demonstrated major changes, including the replacement of all the artists featured in the board game. By contrast, the localized version of the board game did not alter its narrative. Overall, the localized version adapts the artworks and artists while preserving the mechanics and essence of the original board game.

Keywords: Board game, rulebook, localization, multimodal translation

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Introduction

Nowadays, board games are played by people of different ages and cultures. To meet a diverse range of audiences with different languages and cultural backgrounds, board games are increasingly being localized. To localize a board game, multiple elements must be taken into consideration, which are generally categorized into two groups of linguistic and non-linguistic elements. The present research aims to assess both of these elements at the same time within a single board game, namely *Modern Art*, localized from English to Persian. This integrated approach responds to calls in translation studies to move beyond text-centric models and to account for the interaction between verbal and non-verbal resources in meaning-making. The study, then, positions the localization of board games within the current dialogue of multimodal translation and game studies.

For the linguistic assessment, the linguistic techniques most frequently employed in the translation of the text were identified. For the non-linguistic assessment, semiotic, cultural, and narrative elements were examined to determine whether these elements were changed and, if so, in what ways. This dual-track analysis provides documentation of the changes made and provides insight into the localizing strategies that are applied to create functionality and cultural relevance to the product.

To this end, the rulebook is treated not merely as a written document but as a multimodal artifact whose interpretation depends on the coordinated functioning of multiple semiotic systems.

This research is significant because it evaluates the board game rulebook as a multimodal entity that mediate play, culture, and instruction simultaneously. This research can be of value to experts in board game localization and designers, as well as to publishers, translators, and scholars in translation and game studies. They can gain insight into how both linguistic and non-linguistic elements affect the adaptation of board games across cultures.

Board Game Localization

Although board games are highly popular these days, they are not a new phenomenon; rather, they have a long and rich history “dating back to approximately 7000 BC” (Samarasinghe et al., 2021). Traditional board games continue to be played worldwide; however, according to a study conducted by Samarasinghe et al. (2021), most of the board games that have ranked among the 10,000 top board games were distributed after 2015.

People play board games for different reasons. One of the primary reasons is that people seek to socialize with one another through playing board games (PÍŠOVÁ, 2023). Besides socializing, many adults play board games “as a way to relax and reduce stress from work and life in general” (PÍŠOVÁ, 2023, p. 33). Besides the reasons for playing, the question of what board games are and how they can be defined is also a subject of research. Since there are many types of board games and they are varied, providing a precise and exact definition can be challenging (Tomková, 2014). However, some researchers have proposed definitions of board games. D’Astous and Gagnon (2007) noted that a board game is defined by the following characteristics: 1. It can be played by two or more people, 2. It is played around a board or any kind of physical entity, 3. It has a set of rules, 4. The aim of the game is clear (as cited in Tomková, 2014, p. 12). Whereas some scholars define board games based on a single trait. Cronin (1998) believes that what makes board games different and particularly interesting is that they are unpredictable and there is more than one way to win the game. Another scholar, Schell (2008) argued that one characteristic specific to games, which can be used to define them, is that they offer problem solving and “Any game with a goal effectively has presented you with a problem to solve” (p. 35).

Evans (2013) argues that, to achieve the goal of the game, players strategically combine the rules of the game with the components of the board game. Another significant characteristic of board games that has contributed to their widespread popularity is the fact that they encompass a wide range of different genres. Silverman (2013) believes that the variety of board game genres is one of the primary reasons that people these days are paying more attention to board games; “Board games have seen an unexpected resurgence among gamers of all kinds” (p. 1). Based on these genres, people interested in board games tend to categorize them into various groups and classifications. Seen in this light, Whitehill (2008, p. 53) emphasizes that the classification of board games is necessary in order to establish a coherent system of description and terminology that facilitates better communication about games. Both historians and contemporary players share this desire to compare and contrast games. Whitehill (2008) notes, “The need to classify games comes with the yearning to understand the similarities and differences between games old and new across cultural boundaries” (p. 53).

One influential categorization proposed by Whitehill (2008) suggests that board games can be divided into seven main categories, which are as follows: 1. Games of alignment, 2. Race games, 3. Games of capture, 4. Building games, 5. Trading and negotiation games, 6. Games of survival, and those which cannot be categorized in the previous six sections as 7. Others. Also, Rendón Arboleda (2025) argued that, throughout history, different board games have been created to suit various people and preferences, leading to distinct categories of board games such as “games for children, educational games, sports games, word games, card games, strategy games, and more” (p. 1).

Board games from different genres have various game parts, boards, sets of rules, and stories, all of which contributes to understanding a board game completely. While genre distinctions show what kind of experience a game offers, it is the rulebook that determines how that experience is communicated. Rules are very crucial for playing board games; as Schell (2008) asserts, “A game is not just defined by its rules, a game is its rules” (p. 149). Board game rulebooks outline the mechanics of play, resolve possible questions that players might have, provide helpful guides, and help the game to reach more people and markets (Rendón Arboleda, 2025). Rulebooks typically contain texts, illustrative photographs, manuals, and additional relevant information. Since rulebooks contain many layers, “Perhaps the most overt multimodality is found in the rulebook itself” (Bartels, 2023, p. 20). This multimodality causes the understanding of the rulebook to be dependent on all of its layers and shows the importance of examining all the layers together. Damaskinidis (2015) believes that the meaning of a multimodal text is understood through the interplay of multiple semiotic modes on a single surface like a paper, whereas monomodal materials rely solely on written language in paragraphs (p. 23).

Methodology

The English board game, *Modern Art*, and its localized version هنر مدرن (Honare Modern), were chosen for the aim of this study. *Modern Art* was selected as the focus of this study, because, on the one hand, it holds a strong rating on BoardGameGeek, and on the other hand, the extent of localization observed in its Persian version is significant. The game is categorized under card games and economic games. Moreover, it is considered a strategy board game. *Modern Art* was first published in German in 1992. The creator of this board game is Reiner Knizia. It is played in the form of an auction, and the cards of the game are paintings of famous painters; therefore, this board game is highly connected to a country's culture and art.

This study aims to answer the following question based on the chosen board game: What are the linguistic, semiotic, cultural and narrative differences between the original and localized versions of the board game?

Four considerations of Taylor (2016) were used as the main framework for this study. Since board game rulebooks are considered to be multimodal, this framework provides a strong foundation for analyzing them. It can be used for analyzing linguistic and non-linguistic features of a material, which in this study would be rulebooks. Rulebooks contain written texts, photos, symbols, and other modes of transferring information. For the localization of a rulebook, all these modes should be taken into consideration and transformed carefully where needed, and as a result, this framework can help examine these changes.

Data Analysis Procedure

This study contains both verbal and non-verbal data which was taken from the rulebooks of two English and Persian versions of the game. Four groups of elements were assembled and analyzed according to the framework proposed by Taylor (2016), which focuses on four types of elements in multimodal texts: linguistic, semiotic, cultural and narrative.

For each element, different sets of data needed to be collected. The data for the textual elements were obtained from the text of the story, the explanation of the aim of the game, the description of how to prepare the game, the introduction of the game components, the general and specific rules, the instructions on how to play, and an example of the gameplay. These constitute the first part of the rulebook for this board game. However, the second part of the rulebook, covering nearly twenty pages, is dedicated to introducing the artists whose works are featured in the board game, and also includes an art book showcasing their pieces. Although this section appears to the same extent in the localized rulebook, the artists and their artworks are entirely different. In the localized version, Iranian artists are introduced, and their paintings are presented; therefore, there is no direct equivalence. In terms of translational linguistic analysis Molina and Hurtado Albir (2002) list of translation techniques were adapted. It includes adaptation, amplification, borrowing, calque, compensation, description, discursive creation, established equivalent, generalization, linguistic amplification, linguistic compression, literal translation, modulation, particularization, reduction, substitution, transposition and variation.

However, as mentioned earlier, a rulebook does not contain only linguistic elements. It also includes numerous semiotic elements, such as photos, symbols, images of components, artworks, photos of artists, and semiotic features applied to words, such as boldness and italicization. All these elements were collected from both rulebooks. They were then compared to determine which of the following conditions had occurred: 1. Added 2. Changed 3. Omitted, 4. Compensated, and 5. Kept. These five conditions were selected because they encompass all the possible situations that could occur with these elements.

For analyzing semiotic elements, the visual language matrix proposed by Kostelnick and Roberts (2011) was used. This matrix identifies different types of changes in visual elements by distinguishing three modes, which are textual, graphic, and spatial. It also includes there are four levels, which are intra-level, inter-level, extra-level, and supra-level. Together, these categories produce twelve possible types of changes that can occur in visual elements.

Some of these types of changes were eliminated from the analysis of this study because they proved to be irrelevant. For this study, two pairs of changes were merged based on their similarities and the same function that they offered for board game rulebooks. Ultimately, the matrix was reorganized into five groups to more effectively align with the analysis of board game rulebook localization and the data were analyzed based on these five types of changes. The resulting groups, together with their corresponding modes and levels, are: 1. Textual mode/intra-level: micro-level textual form: style, size, weight, and posture of letters, numbers, and symbols, 2. Graphic mode/ intra-level: marks: punctuation, underscoring; iconicity of letters and words, 3. Textual mode/ supra-level: macro-level

serial and segmenting devices: section titles, numbers; page headers, pagination, 4. Spatial mode/ supra-level: cohesion of entire document over several planes: page breaks, size; location of extra-textuals within text, 5. Graphic mode/ supra-level: coding marks unifying pages or sections of text: line work, color, icons, logos, tabs.

At the cultural level, culture-specific components, including character names, idiomatic expressions, mentions of artist names, subjects related to a specific country, and broader cultural notions, were identified and analyzed to determine whether they matched the target culture. Cultural elements and their changes were presented only in the form of qualitative data. However, to describe the type of change for cultural elements, three categories were determined: unchanged (retained in their original form without any modification), changed but not culturally adapted (altered linguistically but without aligning with the target culture), and changed and culturally adapted (modified to align both linguistically and culturally with the norms of the target culture).

The final set of elements that were assessed in this study consisted of narrative elements. Since these elements must be viewed holistically rather than as separate components, the data were presented in a qualitative form, and they were not quantified. For this assessment, the general storyline was checked to determine if the story had changed after the translation. To describe the type of change for these elements, two categories of types of changes were needed, unchanged (the general storyline was kept the same) and changed (the general storyline was changed).

Findings and Discussion

The localization of this board game was carried out by the company سرزمین ذهن زیبا [The Land of Beautiful Mind]. It should be mentioned that only the rulebooks of these two versions were analyzed for this study. The details of the versions are included in Table 1.

Table 1. Rulebooks' Specifications

No.	Name	Version	Company	Year
1	<i>Modern Art</i>	English	Hans im Glück + 22 more	1992
2	هنر مدرن (Honare Modern)	Persian	The land of beautiful mind	Unknown

Linguistic Dimension

Table 2 provides three extracts from the *Modern Art* rulebook, along with their corresponding sentences from the Persian rulebook. These samples are not intended to be exhaustive; rather, they are representative instances that illustrate how linguistic choices are shaped by broader cultural and functional considerations in the localization process.

Table 2. Linguistic Dimension Samples

No.	English Sentence	Persian Sentence	Translation Technique
1	Rafael Silveira does very well in the first round.	استاد «علی اکبر صادقی» در دور نخست فوق العاده بود.	Adaptation (change of the name)
2	Cards in the players' hands are not discarded between rounds.	ولی کارتهایی که هنوز در «دست» بازیکنان هستند، برای دور بعدی در دست بازیکنان باقی میمانند.	Modulation (change of point of view)
3	For now, players will just be auctioning off the paintings.	---	Reduction (omission of the unit)

Although many concepts have remained seemingly intact in the localized version of this board game, the sentences have undergone numerous changes to suit the target audience and enhance comprehensibility. These changes indicate that the localization strategy prioritizes functional clarity over formal equivalence. Some sentences were completely omitted as instances of reduction, one example of which can be seen in the third row of the table. In such cases, the meaning was conveyed through other sentences rather than through direct translation.

The names of painters and individuals in examples of gameplay were all changed, which were considered instances of adaptation. This holistic replacement of personal names goes beyond stylistic preference and reflects a culturally motivated effort to localize gameplay scenarios, allowing Iranian players to engage more easily with examples by situating them within a familiar cultural framework. On the other hand, changes in point of view were mostly cases of modulation, such as the example presented in the second row. The original sentence states “cards are not discarded”; however, in the translation, it states “کارت‌ها در دست بازیکنان باقی می‌مانند”, which reflects a shift in point of view and, therefore, a case of modulation. This modulation aligns with Persian instructional discursive norms, which often favor explicit affirmation over implicit negation, particularly in rule-based texts.

All the translation techniques used for the translation of the sentences and phrases of the original rulebook were counted and presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Translation Techniques

No.	Translation Technique	Frequency of Usage	Percentage of Usage
1	Borrowing	1	0.8%
2	Compensation	1	0.8%
3	Particularization	7	5.7%
4	Generalization	5	4%
5	Discursive creation	2	1.6%
6	Calque	3	2.4%
7	Reduction	29	23.7%
8	Amplification	23	18.8%
9	Adaptation	25	20.4%
10	Modulation	8	6.5%
11	Linguistic compression	3	2.4%
12	Variation	3	2.4%
13	Transposition	3	2.4%
14	Linguistic amplification	9	7.3%

The most frequently used technique for translating the text of the rulebook was reduction. In the context of board game rulebooks, reduction should not be interpreted as a loss of meaning but rather as a strategic adaptation aimed at improving usability and readability. Several sentences were completely omitted from the translated rulebook of the localized board game, such as “number of cards dealt at the beginning:” which appeared above a table in the rulebook. This table provided instructions regarding how many cards should be dealt to each player. In the Persian version, only the table was included. Moreover, many sentences were not fully translated, and they underwent reduction in the translation process.

Two other techniques that were used most frequently were adaptation and amplification, respectively. The high frequency of adaptation underscores the centrality of culture in, as culturally specific references were consistently reconfigured to resonate with Iranian collective culture. For example, instances of changing names to Iranian names were considered cases of adaptation.

Other techniques were used far less. However, linguistic amplification, modulation, and particularization together constituted almost twenty percent of the techniques employed. Taken together, this distribution suggests that linguistic variation in the localized rulebook is not random but indeed oriented toward cultural accessibility, instructional clarity, and player engagement. Seen in this light, it reinforces the view that linguistic choices in board game localization are ultimately governed by cultural and functional priorities rather than textual fidelity.

Semiotic Dimension

There are many semiotic elements in both versions and they were compared to examine how they changed during localization. Three examples of this comparison are presented in Table 4. It should be mentioned that these instances might include other types of changes as well which are not the focus of this section.

Table 4. Semiotic Changes Samples

No.	English Unit	Persian Unit	State	Place in Matrix
1	Without letting any other player see your bid, hold out a closed fist with your bid hidden inside.	در هر صورت، هیچ بازیکنی نباید از مبلغ داخل مشت شما (چه ۰ دلار چه ۱.۰۰۰.۰۰۰ دلار) باخبر شود!!	(Exclamation mark/ exclamation mark) Added/ Added	Intra-level/ graphic mode
2			(Picture) Omitted	Supra-level/ spatial mode
3			Changed	Supra-level/ graphic mode

Semiotic changes can occur at different levels and across various modes, and they may take different forms, such as additions and alternations. In the localized version of this rulebook, many exclamation marks were added to increase emphasis, with each exclamation mark counted as a single instance. To assess the images at the supra-level and within the spatial mode, the location of pictures was examined. In some cases, such as the example presented in the second row of Table 4, the image was completely omitted, and only the name of the board was written on the page. Therefore, it was the case of an omitted state. At the top of every page, there was a line containing the name of the board game, included throughout the rulebook to keep it consistent. Although this feature appeared in both English and Persian versions, it was modified in the localized version.

In Table 5, the changes of semiotic elements along with their localization state are presented. At last, the numbers written show how many semiotic changes have occurred in the process of localization of this rulebook.

Table 5. Semiotic Changes

Semiotic Elements	Added	Changed	Omitted	Compensated	Kept
Italic	-	4	15	-	11
Bold	-	-	18	-	25
Underlined	-	-	-	-	-

Exclamation mark	58	-	-	-	2
Headings	-	-	1	-	20
Location of extra-textual elements	3	3	1	-	1
Page colors	2	1	-	-	4
Page watermark	-	-	-	-	-
Icons spread all over the page	2	4	-	-	-

The most noticeable number in Table 5 is fifty-eight added exclamation marks. The exclamation mark falls under the intra-level and graphic mode. Although only two exclamation marks were used in the English rulebook, numerous exclamation marks were added to Persian sentences to increase emphasis. Writing in italics is not very common in Persian, and fifteen italicized units were rendered in non-italic form; however, interestingly, eleven units that were not originally italicized became italic in the localized rulebook. This shift indicates a refunctionalization of typographic emphasis, adapted to Persian reading habits and expectations rather than mechanically reproducing source-text conventions.

Many bold units were kept, some were omitted, and none were added. Furthermore, most of the headings remained similar to those in the original rulebook. This relative stability suggests that higher-level structural markers were considered sufficiently neutral or functional across cultures, requiring minimal adaptation. Notably, there were no underlined units in either rulebook, and neither version contained watermarks.

Cultural Dimension

Because of its use of paintings and named artists, this board game is intrinsically and explicitly embedded in cultural production. In the localization version, the paintings and the artists were changed completely. These changes represent one of the most radical interventions observed in the localization process, as they directly affect the symbolic and cultural identity of the game. The cultural examples of these rulebooks are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Cultural Elements Samples

No.	English unit	Persian unit	State
1	15 cards Rafael Silveira	۱۴ تابلو کارت از استاد «آیدین آغداشلو»	Changed and culturally adapted
2	The Banker gives 100 k€ (100.000 €) to each player:	بانکدار، به هر بازیکن 100 \$ (یک صد هزار دلار) پول می‌دهد.	Changed but not culturally adapted
3			Changed and culturally adapted

Three possible outcomes may occur with cultural elements: the elements may remain unchanged, they may change without cultural adaptation, or they may change with cultural adaptation. In the localized version, the names of the artists were all changed to real Iranian artists' names, and their paintings were included in the rulebook of the board game. This systematic replacement goes beyond localization at the level of reference and constitutes a form of cultural re-anchoring, whereby the game's symbolic capital is relocated within the Iranian artistic tradition.

Likewise, the museums, which are important components of this board game, were changed and culturally adapted. For example, one of the museums in the original board game was Sao Paulo Museum; however, in the localized board game, this museum was replaced with Tehran Museum of

Contemporary Art. These are two instances of cultural elements that were changed and culturally adapted. In the second example, the currency unit in the English rulebook was Euro, but in the Persian version, it was changed to dollar. Unlike the adaptation of artists and museums, this change does not align fully with Iranian cultural norms and therefore falls into the category of change without cultural adaptation.

Since this board game is about art and artists of a country, it is highly related to a country's culture. In the original board game and its rulebook, real artists and artworks were used. The alteration of paintings and artists in the rulebook resulted in a deeper connection between the Iranian player and the game by invoking a sense of cultural familiarity. The localizers of this board game had taken permission from the creator of the game and all the artists whose works have been used in this board game before they localized it. However, there exist a few cases that have not been appropriately changed based on the cultural norms like the currency. The museums featured in this board game, which are important components, were mostly the same for both versions; only one was changed to an Iranian version, which was the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. The combination of different museums gave a sense of internationality to the localized version.

Narrative Dimension

The rulebook of this board game did not consist of a specific storyline based on its genre. Nevertheless, the explanation of the game's objectives and mechanics effectively serves as its implicit narrative, framing the roles, actions, and strategies of the players within a coherent situational context. Part of it can be viewed in Table 7.

Table 7. Narrative Structure Samples

No.	English Unit	Persian Unit	State of Narrative
1	In the game, players take on the role of a Museum that is trying to buy and sell paintings at the best price.	بازیکنان، موزه‌دارهایی هستند که تلاش می‌کنند تابلوهای نقاشی را به بهترین قیمت، خرید و فروش کنند.	Unchanged
2	Each round, paintings are auctioned by the players.	در هر دور، بازیکنان، تابلوهایی را به حراج می‌گذارند.	Unchanged

This section in the rulebook describes the role of the players and the situation in which they participate and thus can be considered as the narrative dimension of the board game. It could exist in two possible states: unchanged, where the original gameplay description is preserved, and changed, where adjustments may be made for localization or adaptation purposes. Two examples presented in Table 7 illustrate two narrative units that have not undergone any modifications.

Players take on the roles of museum owners and are required to choose a museum to place in front of them. Throughout the game, auctions provide opportunities for strategic decision-making, where players may acquire artworks to hold for future advantage and sell them at moments that maximize profit. This concept and narrative remained the same in the localized version. In fact, while several surface details of the board game were adapted to suit the target audience, the core narrative and underlying gameplay dynamics remained intact. This illustrates how localization can modify peripheral elements without altering the fundamental narrative structure of a game, preserving both the experiential and strategic essence intended by the original designers.

Taken together, the findings reveal a clear hierarchy of localization priorities. What distinguishes this localization from more conventional cases is the degree to which localization operates not as textual mediation but as cultural re-authorship. Rather than merely translating the rulebook, the localizers reconstructed the semiotic and cultural identity of the game while preserving its mechanical core. This

positions the Persian version closer to a culturally recontextualized edition than to a straightforward translation. This case supports the argument that localization, particularly in multimodal artifacts such as board games, must be understood as an interpretive and creative practice rather than a derivative one. The Persian version of *Modern Art* exemplifies how localization can function as cultural mediation, design adaptation, and experiential translation simultaneously.

Conclusion

The localization of *Modern Art* into its Persian version illustrates the challenges of adapting a multimodal text — in this case, the rulebook — for a different cultural context. While the Persian version underwent significant changes in semiotic and cultural elements, the linguistic components experienced lighter edits, and the narrative elements remained unchanged. Regarding linguistic elements, reduction, adaptation, and amplification were the most frequently used translation techniques. The overall meaning of sentences was largely preserved; however, details were often omitted or added to ensure clarity. In terms of semiotics, most images were modified, and numerous exclamation marks were added to heighten enthusiasm. Additionally, the text itself experienced several modifications, such as the use of bold type for certain words. At the cultural level, the Persian rulebook showed many differences from the original rulebook, appealing to Iranian norms, by using Iranian artworks. However, in some cases—such as the choice of the game’s currency—the changes were not exactly based on cultural norms. Finally, with respect to narrative elements, the board game did not undergo changes, and the descriptions of the board game and the roles of players remained consistent between the Persian version and the original version.

Therefore, it can be observed that most of the changes in this board game occurred in semiotic and cultural elements, reflecting a tendency to make the game visually familiar, interesting, and culturally appropriate for its target players. By preserving the fundamental mechanics and narrative, the game successfully delivered the same gameplay experience as the original version. It can be concluded that maintaining the essence of a board game while ensuring that it is understandable, and culturally suitable for players is of significant importance.

This study might hopefully offer insights not only to researchers and localizers working in this area but also to anyone interested in the subject of board game localization. Future studies may explore how multimodal design elements, such as layout or typography, influence players’ comprehension and ultimately affect their gameplay experience.

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