

Arabic Subtitles on English Movies: Some Linguistic, Ideological and Pedagogic Issues

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Abstract: *The study provides an investigation of a sample of Arabic subtitles on English movies and TV dramas in an attempt to identify and account for some patterns of "corruption" in these subtitles, to provide some suggestions for fixing such subtitling problems and to provide some guidelines for doing, and teaching, Arabic subtitling on English audiovisual texts. The investigation of the sample Arabic subtitles on the English movies - Big Daddy, Tempted, and Lizzie McGuire Movie - and TV dramas identifies specific patterns of problems: Literal translation, insensitivity to context, ungrammatical, unnatural or inaccurate translations, treatment of foul language and unnecessary formality. The discussion of the problems and the analysis thereof addresses some of the major issues in translating Arabic to English in general and in doing English-to-Arabic audiovisual translation (ATV) in particular.*

1. Introduction

The Italian "Traduttore traditore" ("Translator, you are a traitor") is a bit overgeneralized and cruel but very real. Some of the "treasons" in translation are quite intentional, but many are not. In either case, the result is the same: corruption of the original in different degrees depending on how "dishonest" the translation is. Whether they are corruptions resulting from lack of knowledge or mastery of either the source or the target language (SL and TL, respectively), or intentional distortions of a source text (ST) for ideological or pedagogic purposes, such mistakes have stereotypically been examined much more often in written than spoken texts. One area that remains under-represented in translation studies, due to the overall lack of attention to the translation of spoken discourse, is translation on screen, or audiovisual translation (AVT). (Baker & Hochel, 1998: 76).

The present study provides a preliminary investigation of a sample of Arabic subtitles on English movies and TV dramas. The goals of the study are: (1) to identify and account for some patterns of "corruption" in these subtitles, (2) to provide some suggestions for fixing such subtitling problems and, more broadly (3) to provide some guidelines for doing, and teaching, Arabic subtitling on English audiovisual texts. To achieve these goals, the study starts with a brief note on subtitling as a mode of interpreting that mixes the spoken with the written, of subtitling as opposed economically, linguistically and ideologically to another mode of AVT – dubbing - and of the main constraints and pressures under which subtitlers work. Next, the introduction touches on some problems of subtitling and where they come from and the skills and strategies subtitlers may

use to overcome the lack of equivalence between the SL and the TL. The investigation of the sample problem areas in Arabic subtitles on English movies and TV dramas starts with a note on the sources of the data and the method used in dealing with them. Then, the problems identified in the texts are categorized and analyzed. The discussion of the problems and the analysis thereof addresses some of the major issues in translating Arabic to English in general and in doing English-to-Arabic AVT in particular.

2. Subtitling

2.1. Subtitling as translation

Subtitling is, at least partially, one mode of interpreting - the translation of spoken discourse. Some of the major insights into interpreting can be useful in approaching subtitling as well. For example, it should be examined as "an act of communication" or a "communicative event" (Nida, 1964: xx). In the subtitling event, three participants get involved: (the human agent/s behind) the text on screen, the audience, and the subtitler (Anderson, 1976: 210). The subtitler is not as invisible or neutral as some might be tempted to think (For similar views on interpreting, see Berk-Seligson, 1990; Fenton, 1997; Fowler, 1997; Davidson, 2000; Roy, 2000). The amount of subtitlers' agency and participation in the subtitling communicative event varies in accordance with personality, training, culture, text and context and situation.

2.2. Subtitling vs. dubbing

Dubbing is "the technique of post-synchronization consisting in the deleting of the original voice of the actor pronouncing the text during the shots, and its substitution with another recording" usually in another language (Osimo, 2004, www). In dubbing, a form of "ventriloquism," the issues of "authenticity and originality" become meaningless. The dubbed movie or drama or program, the TT, is "a new and fundamentally recontextualized" version of the original. The original, the ST, becomes a mere "blueprint, which shifts its status from that of a finished and culturally specific text to that of a transcultural denationalized raw material, which is to be reinscribed into a new cultural context" (Ascheid, 1997: 33). In Venuti's (1995) words, the original movie or drama is "domesticated" and its foreignness "minimized" (Munday 2001: 146). Dubbing, therefore, has "a normalising and neutralising effect, depriving source text producers of their voice and re-expressing foreign cultural values in terms of what is familiar (and therefore unchallenging) to the dominant [target] culture" (Hatim and Mason 1997: 145). The "foreign" movie is tamed in the receiving culture artistically, linguistically and ideologically: "the original performance is altered by the addition of a different voice" (Mera, 1999: 80), which is borne out in the frequent incongruities between what the real actors say (in the source piece) and the movement of the new actors' lips (in the dubbing), between the language spoken and the culture represented by the ST.

In subtitling, on the other hand, the ST is not domesticated and the TT does not claim the status of an original. Subtitling, rather than tame the foreign ST and accommodate it to the target culture (TC), sends viewers "abroad" (Munday 2001: 147, citing Venuti, 1995). It retains the "foreignness" of the ST: "hearing the real voices of the characters not only facilitates understanding in terms of the specific dialogue or plot structure, but gives vital clues to status, class and relationship" (Mera, 1999: 75). Whatever is lost in the subtitles can be made up for with little knowledge of the SL and understanding of the context and the nonverbal communication signals used.

In the present study, the focus is on interlingual (English-Arabic) subtitles used as a linguistic aid. In this sense, subtitling provides an example of the "crossover between an oral ST and a written TT" (Hervey and Higgins, 1992: 159). In films, TV dramas and other genres, subtitles are caption-like translations into a TL. They are written versions of the dialogue, narration and lyrics in the ST. Thus, the transfer is double: from SL to TL and from speech to writing. Subtitling, "being diasemiotic by nature, shifts this balance by 'crossing over' from speech to writing. Naturally, this changes the working strategies of the translator as well as viewers' strategies of reception, vis-à-vis dubbing" (Gottlieb, 2004: 86).

In both dubbing and subtitling; in fact, in all cinematic and televisual texts, viewers have to deal with four types of semiotic codes. Following Baker and Hochel (1998), the four codes are: the verbal-auditory (dialogue, background voices and lyrics); the nonverbal-auditory (natural sounds, sound effects and music); the verbal-visual, (subtitles and any writing within movie or drama - letters, posters, books, newspapers, graffiti, or ads), and the nonverbal-visual (the composition of the image, camera positions and movement and the general flow and mood of the movie or drama). In dubbing, the verbal auditory code is silenced in favor of TL voices; in subtitling, this code remains intact. It is translated into the TL and translation becomes part of the verbal visual code in the new text – the TT.

Thus, subtitling is more economical than dubbing. The latter requires a whole cast to do the speaking on behalf of the original actors. Moreover, the new voices should be synchronized to match with the lip movements of the actors in the ST. The economic factor accounts for the preference of subtitling in some countries such as Egypt (Leaman, 2001: 45). On the other hand, subtitling, as already indicated above, is more authentic than dubbing, not only in the sense of maintaining the foreignness of the ST, but also in the sense of preserving "the integrity of a holistic performance" (Mera, 1999: 75). Subtitling does not "fundamentally tamper with the original text; rather, it adds something to facilitate its understanding" (Ascheid, 1997: 34). One of the outcomes of this is that it offers a good opportunity for those who want to get exposed to a foreign language in a natural setting. Ironically, it is this very aspect of subtitling that is responsible for many criticisms thereof. In dubbing, viewers do not have a chance to compare with the original. In subtitling, the mismatches between the subtitles and the ST dialogue, observable only to someone who is familiar with

the SL, can become "a hindrance to the potential enjoyment" of the movie or TV drama or program (Mera, 1999: 79).

There are still other differences between the two modes of AVT – the "supplementary" mode of subtitling and the "substitutional" mode of dubbing (Gottlieb, 2004: 87). Subtitling can more easily accommodate non-verbal signals such as notice-boards and non-spoken demarcations of time and place, e.g., "New York 1960." However, interjections and emotional outbursts can be more easily captured in dubbing. Moreover, there is a lot of reduction in subtitling due to many constraints that are discussed below. A great deal of the ST dialogue is "lost in translation." What is really not lost in subtitling, in the case of translating into Arabic, is the harmony between modern Standard Arabic (SA) and the written mode of subtitles. In a movie dubbed into Arabic, a dialogue between spouses in bed in SA is very hard to believe. This is not a serious hindrance in subtitling because of the stereotypical association between writing and SA.

The choice between subtitling and dubbing depends on many factors – linguistic, economic and ideological. An ideology where the Other should be silenced in favor of the Self normally prefers dubbing. Subtitling results in the perception of "difference" rather than the confirmation of "sameness" and identity. This may lead to "a considerable loss of pleasure during this experience" (Ascheid, 1997: 34). Viewers will differ in their perception of the two AVT modes depending on their familiarity with and attitude to the SL. Some will be upset by the "cultural discount" (Hoskins & Mirus, 1988, 1990) a foreign program, movie or TV drama undergoes when it is dubbed or subtitled. There is obviously less discount in subtitling. Yet, subtitles distort the cultural and linguistic aspects of the foreign program, movie or TV drama in their own way.

2.3. Subtitling under pressure

Subtitling is "a form of gist translation." There are very "tight constraints" in terms of time and space (Hervey and Higgins, 1992: 159). Only a limited number of characters/ letters are permitted, or feasible, in a subtitle (some 32 characters, two lines maximum) and the viewer of a film must be given enough time to read and understand a subtitle and to "absorb the visual image which it accompanies." Moreover, a minimum time must be allowed between each two subtitles, "even though the moving image is continuous" (Lewis, 2004: 106). To further tighten the constraints, a good subtitler will aim at reproducing, not just the meaning, but also the "characteristics of the oral style of the ST," e.g., "social register," "tonal register," "dialect" and "sociolect" (Hervey and Higgins, 1992: 159). It is sometimes almost impossible to capture everything in the ST dialogue - false starts, repairs, overlaps and whispers, to mention only a few features. It is also very difficult, though extremely commendable, that the subtitles do not obstruct viewers' enjoyment of the ST (Bogucki, 2004).

A very serious challenge to subtitlers; in fact, to all translators, is whether to translate a taboo word in the ST into an equivalent taboo word in the TT. Taboo words are just one part of the story. Any cultural or ideological element

that is alien or not acceptable in another culture remains a problem in subtitling. To domesticate or foreignize is a question that will be answered differently by different people in different circumstances. Weston (2003) suggests that the function of a translator is "to reproduce in the TL as accurate as possible an equivalent of the content and form of the SL text, having regard, where legitimate choices of nomenclature or style arise, to the function of the original, the purpose of translating it and the translation's intended readership" (p. 148). The question remains open: how far should a subtitler have "regard" to his/her audience? The road taken by a subtitler reflects his/her education, including the subtitling or translation training s/he has received, his/her cultural background, including his/her notion of the Other, as well as his/her perception of what is ethically sound and what is acceptable in the community.

2.4. Un mal nécessaire

That subtitling is a necessary evil - "un mal nécessaire" (Marleau, 1982) - should be too obvious to merit a lot of elaboration. It is "necessary" because not all viewers of a foreign movie or TV drama or program are familiar with its language. Many of those who are find it easier to glance at the subtitles rather than decode the ST dialogue. This is not, pedagogically, a good habit and almost every teacher of English in the Arab world has at some point warned his/ her students against relying on the Arabic subtitles on a movie in English. Williams and Thorne (2000) report on how students learning foreign language subtitling acquired impressive language skills simply as a byproduct of their subtitling practice. On the other hand, subtitling is "evil" because of the many corruptions and the many distortions of the ST. To quote Nornes (1999),

All of us have, at one time or another, left a movie theater wanting to kill the translator. Our motive: the movie's murder by 'incompetent' subtitle." "The original, foreign, object - its sights and its sounds - is available to all, but it is easily obscured by the graphic text through which we necessarily approach it. Thus, the opacity or awkwardness of subtitles easily inspires rage (p. 18).

For more complaints and case studies of corrupt subtitles, see also Gottlieb (2001), Jackel (2001), James (2001), and Piette (2002).

Where does the corruption come from? One source that Nornes (1999) suggests is "incompetence" – lack of training, inability to handle idioms, formulaic expressions and figurative language, and so on. Literal translation and lack of sensitivity to context and tone are important indications of incompetence: "all the more important is the tone in which [words] are said...Vibrations of the voice may mean many things that are not included in the meaning of the word itself" (Balázs, 1970: 227). The incompetence is often tolerated by filmmakers because of "subtitling's ancillary, even hidden, position in the film's journey from production to exhibition" (Nornes, 1999: 18).

2.5. Strategies and skills

The pressure to give a gist translation in order to meet the spatio-temporal requirements referred to above is another source of corruption in subtitles.

Gisting may be achieved through any of the following strategies: condensation - eliminating redundancies automatically while retaining the main stylistic features of the ST, decimation - abridging expressions and reducing content, or deletion - omitting "repetitions, filler words and tag questions" (Gottlieb, 1998, cited in Schwarz, 2003, WWW). In some cases, the reduction or gisting is "innocent." For example, someone waving "Good bye" in an English movie is intelligible enough without an Arabic subtitle such as "إلى اللقاء" - unless it is not a simple straightforward goodbye. In other cases, the reduction reveals either a lack of competence in some aspect of the SL or an attempt to accommodate the foreign culture to the local norms and values.

Professional subtitlers know how to hide incompetence when dealing with a problem area in the ST, e.g., cultural terms, names of places and persons, currencies, obsolete words, taboo expressions, proverbs and proverbials, puns and wordplay, acronyms and songs. They may use what Katan (1999) calls **chunking** - the change in size of something, e.g., a text. The size might be changed through **chunking up**: from narrow to broad, e.g., "cow" becomes "animal," **chunking down**: from the generic to the specific, or **chunking sideways**: using an equivalent or a synonym (pp. 147-57). In dealing with metaphors, puns and wordplay, subtitlers have many options: translate (if possible), paraphrase, replace with an equivalent from the TT, or avoid altogether (Delabatista, 1999, cited in Schwarz, 2003, www), in order that such strategies may be used effectively, they should be part of a broader spectrum of skills which includes, in addition to the basic skills of interpreting: listening attentively, getting the content and the main idea, reading/viewing the screen for visual and non-verbal clues which make up the context and the paralanguage of the message, translating/ interpreting all of the above, in an effective, honest, natural, clear manner, observing the special style of the message subtitled, considering the register of the language of the subtitles, creating easy-to-read subtitles which enable the viewer to absorb the ST's meaning as effortlessly as possible while ensuring total comprehension and displaying the target language version in an aesthetically pleasing, accessible and consistent way on the screen (Williams & Thorne, 2000: 219-221).

Giving more attention to teaching and assessing such strategies and skills is likely to validate the impact of subtitling on learning a foreign language. In the case of English, which is now a "brother tongue" (Gottlieb, 2004: 84) in almost every country, at least in the Arab world, subtitling has had a number of important linguistic-political implications. It has been found to be "instrumental" in improving reading skills, "boosting foreign language skills," "facilitating easy and cheap international program exchange" and "cementing the dominance of English" (p. 87) through promotion of English loan words, formulaic expressions and chunks. Whether this cementing, which results in more and more **Anglification** - Gottlieb's (2001, 2004) term - of the world, is desirable or not depends on our attitude toward English. Whatever this attitude might be, the pedagogical impact of doing subtitling and getting exposed to subtitles should not be underestimated. Because of the multisemiotic nature of subtitling, it offers

a "holistic," "enjoyable" approach and a variety of learning activities in discourse and text analysis and translation, e.g., media text analysis, script analysis, translation and editing and spotting/ cueing (Neves, 2004: 129-130).

2.6. Remarkable lack

In spite of the "revolution" AVT has been undergoing, (Cintas, 2003: 193), there is still so much to accomplish. Although translation of written texts is receiving more and more attention as a discipline, at least as an essential course in any department of foreign languages, and despite the growing importance of AVT, "very few educational institutions around the globe have taken up the challenge to teach dedicated modules on any of the translation modes in general use in the world of audiovisual products" (p. 200). In the same vein, there is very little academic research attention to AVT and to interpreting at large, compared with the study of the translation of written texts. The volumes cited in the bibliography of this study indicate that the gap is being filled in Western and East Asian academia.

The situation in the Arab world is different. Given the number of Arab-based TV and radio channels broadcasting (mainly Anglo-American) foreign movies, TV dramas and serials and programs, the total absence of research on dubbing and subtitling in Arab universities is really surprising. Still more shocking is the remarkable lack of undergraduate courses and graduate training on AVT. The financial aspect is not the most important factor, because even the most well-equipped and well-financed Arab universities have not thus far given enough attention to teaching AVT.

In order to explore the linguistics and politics of subtitling of English televisual and cinematic texts in an Arab context, the starting point is to push "the fact of translation out of the darkness" (Nornes, 1999: 18), i.e., to remember that subtitling is a mode of translation; in fact, a very complex one where a spoken ST is rendered in written captions in the TL and that subtitlers are *visible*, although we do not know who they are in most cases. The ultimate goal should not simply be the spotting of corruption in subtitles. The goal should be to identify and account for the **patterns**, rather than idiosyncratic instances, of corruption in Arabic subtitles on movies, TV dramas and programs in English - an area flagrantly under-researched, if not totally ignored, thus far. The present study seeks to contribute, however modestly, to "pushing" the fact of translation as a linguistic, ideological process in the subtitling of English televisual and cinematic texts into Arabic "out of darkness."

3. Arabic Subtitles on English Movies and TV Dramas

3.1. Sources of data

In addition to occasional references to other audiovisual texts, the data of the present study come from three American movies – *Big Daddy*, *Tempted* and *Lizzie McGuire Movie* (LMM). The selection of sources is meant to provide a spectrum of contexts and uses of language. In the case of the three movies, there

is a continuum of "clean" to "foul" language, indicated by the PG ratings. The data gathered is likely to pose different translation challenges for subtitlers and is thus likely to indicate different patterns of errors and strategies in English-to-Arabic subtitling.

3.2. Method

This is an exploratory, qualitative study. There are no statistics here – just an exploration of some instances of problems and issues in a small sample of Arabic subtitles. I watched the three movies – *Tempted*, *Big Daddy* and *LMM* – twice: once to acquaint myself with the theme, plot and characters, and next to identify the problems in their Arabic subtitles. Then, I checked my transcription of the English problem utterances against the English subtitles. The instances from the other texts came by chance.

My comments on the sample subtitles are qualitative, based on my understanding of the STs. Thus, none of the statements made in the remaining part of the study should be taken as absolute or unquestionable. This is a first approximation to a very complex research topic. Each problem subtitle is followed by its transliteration and, whenever necessary, a back-translation to English. A suggestion is made whenever there is an obvious error. Here and there, terms referring to obscenity and foul language, too many to list in a single paragraph, are used freely, with no attempt at classifying them. One further limitation: nothing is said about the technical problems and constraints involved in subtitling in Arabic. The paper does not address technical, linguistic, or ideological/cultural problems in Arabic-to-English subtitling, either.

3.3. Problems and corrections

In this section, the major mistakes and problems identified in the sample texts are categorized into: the issue of **formality**, insensitivity to **context**, **ungrammaticality**, unnaturalness and inaccuracy, **literal** translations and **foul** language – an umbrella term that covers obscenity, profanity, taboo and swearing. This is obviously an ad hoc categorization; many of the problem subtitles belong to more than one category.

3.3.1. Formality

- "Hey" (*Tempted*): مرحباً "marHaban". This is the invariable translation of "Hey" here and in the other movies. Although the welcoming gambit occurs in many varieties of Arabic, it can be overgeneralized producing something that is simply inaccurate. Shouting "Hey!" at a bar waiting for someone to get him a drink, the private investigator in *Tempted* does not mean to welcome or greet someone. Here مرحباً becomes flagrantly irrelevant. Any "angry" vocative can do instead.
- "Good to meet you" (*Tempted*): سررت بلقائكما "surirtu bi liqaa?ikuma"; "Nice meeting you ma'am" (*Tempted*): سرنى التعرف بك يا سيدتى "sarrani itta'arrufu biki ya sayidati". The translations could have been more accessible and still in SA, e.g., فرصة سعيدة "furSah sa'iidah", which literally means "happy chance."

▪ Responding to "thank you" with a nod and a smile (*Tempted*) and "You are welcome" (*LMM*) are translated إنك على الرحب والسعة و السعة and على الرحب و السعة respectively. These are again unnecessarily formal, mostly unused, gambits which could have been replaced by "afwan" or "al afw", both meaning "Not at all."

3.3.2. Context

▪ "intensity" (*Tempted*): حدة "Hiddah". Referring to the wife being seduced, the young man hired to seduce her tells his friend that she has "this kind of intensity about her." The Arabic subtitle does not capture the real meaning of the word, given the kind of character that we have in the movie. Layly, the wife, is profound and unfathomable. The Arabic word suggests that she is "sharp" and maybe "tough" as well. "al 'umq" – "depth" - or even "al ghumuud" - "vagueness" may do here.

▪ "darling" – the husband addressing a barmaid (*Tempted*): حبيبي "Habiibati". In Arabic, one never addresses a barmaid with "Habiibati". In most cases, a zero address form is used with strangers. The English endearment could have been skipped altogether. For skipping and other strategies for dealing with the lack of equivalence, see Al-Khanji *et al.* (2000: 553-556)

▪ "Do you want a father figure? 'Stop pulling your sister's hair!'" (*Big Daddy*): هل تحتاج شخصية أوية؟ "hal taHtaaj shakhSiyyah ?abawiyah la tasHabi sha'r ?ukhtik". Sonny is unable to move to the next phase of his life and his girl-friend is fed up with this. She tells him she wants a family and a stable life. He makes fun of the kind of person he believes she wants him to be. He believes she wants him to be a father who keeps yelling at his kids "Stop pulling your sister's hair!" In addition to the obvious grammatical problem in "taHtaaj" ("want" or "need" - second person, masculine) where "taHtajiina" (second person, feminine) should be used, the subtitle does not capture the paralinguistic features of the original utterance. هل تريدين أبا متسلطا "hal turiidiina ?aban mutasaliTan" (Do you want a dictatorial father?) is a good SA alternative. An Egyptian Arabic option could be أنت عايزة سى السيد يشخط و ينظر فى البيت "inti ?aayzah si ssayyid yshkhuT wi yunTur fil beet".

▪ "Cadillac. I love it" (*Big Daddy*): إنه يعجبني كاديلاك "kadirak ?innahu yu?jibuni". The clitics "hu" in "?innahu" and "y" in "yu?jibuni" refer to a masculine singular, animate or inanimate. It is a wrong translation of "it" which refers to a car, which is feminine in Arabic. "?innahu" and "yu?jibuni" should be substituted by "?innaha" and "tu?jibuni".

▪ "Hooters" (*Big Daddy*): هوترس "huutirs". In addition to the mistake in reading the final "s" as /s/ not /z/, the subtitle simply **transfers** the word without looking at its cultural implication. Hooters is a restaurant chain in the US whose slogan is "delightfully tacky, yet unrefined" and whose success formula is "good food, cold beer and pretty girls" (www.hooters.com).

▪ "game" (*Big Daddy*): لعبة "li'bah". This is correct as far as the dictionary is concerned, but in the context of the movie it simply means "mubaaraah" - the Arabic for "match."

▪ "I am good" (*LMM*): أنا بخير "ana bi khayr". In the context of the movie, the utterance is not a response to a "How are you?" Lizzie is asking her friend to make a wish. He feels he has got everything he needs – a trip to Italy in the company of his best friend. Thus, لا احتاج شيئا "la ?aHtaaju shay?an" ("I do not need anything") should replace or modify the subtitle.

▪ "You should go away a happy man" (*Tempted*): يجب أن ترحل رجلا سعيدا "yajib ?an tarHala rajulan sa?iidan". "Go away" does not mean "depart" or "leave" in the present context. The sentence means "You should be happy with and proud of your wife" – "yajib ?an takuuna sa?iidan wa fakhuuran bizawjatik" - because she did not succumb to the young man's magic – this is what the young man is saying.

3.3.3. Ungrammatical, unnatural or inaccurate

▪ "really, really sorry" (*Scrubs*): جد آسف "jaddu ?aasif". "?aasif jiddan" is more palatable and still SA.

▪ "I didn't do well" (*Scrubs*): لم أبل حسنا "lam ?ubli Hasanan." This must be a misprint or a slip of the pen. The correct form of the idiomatic expression should "lam ?ubli balaa?an Hasanan".

▪ "He's only a wuss" (*Scrubs*): ليس سوى جبانا "laysa siwa jabnanan". This is ungrammatical. A noun following "siwa" should invariably be in the genitive case. So, it should be "jabannin" or simply "jabaan".

▪ "May I get a drink around this place?" (*Tempted*) هل لرجل أن يتناول شرابا في هذا المكان؟ "hal li rajulin ?an yatanaawala sharaaban fi haaða l makaan". This back-translates as "May a man have a drink in this place?" "hal li ?an ?atanaawala sharaaban fi haaða l makaan" هل لي أن أتناول شرابا في هذا المكان؟ is the accurate translation – the clitics "i" in "li" and "?a" in "?atanaawala" refer to a first person singular.

▪ "I am attached" (*Tempted*): لذي رابط "ladayya raabiT". "?irtibaaT" rather than "raabiT" is commonly used in Arabic to indicate an attachment or a commitment. Thus, "?ana murtabiTah" أنا مرتبطة sounds more Arabic.

▪ "Most beautiful wood I have ever seen" (*Tempted*): الخشب الأجل الذي رأيتُه أبدا "al khashab ul ?ajmal ul laði ra?aytuhu ?abadan". This does not sound Arabic. "?abadan" ("ever") is misplaced at the end of the sentence. It should be substituted either with nothing at all or with something like "fi Hayaati" ("throughout my life"). An even more Arabic version could be "ajmal ma ra?ayt min al khashab/ ?anwaa? il khashab" أجمل ما رأيتُ من الأخشاب/ أنواع الخشب.

▪ "last three weeks have been crazy" (*Big Daddy*): مجننة "mujanninah". The Arabic word, which does not sound Arabic, back-translates into English as "maddening." That the three weeks were "crazy" means they were "crowded" ("muzdaHimah") or "confusing" ("murbikah").

▪ "Don't die." (*Big Daddy*): لا تموت "la tamuut". This is ungrammatical. It should read لا تمت "la tamut".

▪ "roommate" (*Big Daddy*): رفيق الشقة "rafiq ishshaqqah". To sound more Arabic, this should be **chunked up** into "rafiq issakan" – "issakan" السكن referring to any housing arrangement.

▪ "little rain" (*Big Daddy*): مطر صغير "maTar Saghiir". The adjective does not collocate with the noun. "qaliil min al maTar" قليل من المطر would be more natural.

▪ "be a man" (*Big Daddy*): افعل ما تشاء "?if?al ma tashaa?". The Arabic subtitle back-translates as "Do whatever/ as you like". The colloquial "khalliik raajil/ raagil" is a more natural translation.

- "mind your business" (*Big Daddy*): اعتنى بأمورك "?iʔtani bi ʔumuurak". More Arabic-sounding alternatives include the colloquial خليك في حالك "khalliik fi Haalak" and the SA "la tatadakhkhal fi ma la yaʔniik" ("Do not get into something that is none of your business").
- "congratulations" (*Big Daddy*): تهانى "tahaanyy". The subtitle could have been simplified into the simple مبارك - مبروك "mabruuk" – "m(u)baarak".
- "you have to be smart" (*Big Daddy*): يجب أن تكون شاطر "yajib ʔan takuun shaaTir". In addition to the grammatical mistake in "shaaTir" which should be accusative case-marked as "shaaTiran", the colloquial word does not fit in a predominantly SA linguistic context. It has the connotations of "cunning" and "dubious." "yajib ʔan takuun mutafawwiqan" ("You have to be excellent/ to perform well in school") sounds more SA
- "as if you were someone else" (*LMM*): وكأنك شخصاً آخر "wa kaʔannak shakhSan ʔaakhar". "shakhSan" is ungrammatical; it should be "shakhSun".
- "stop yelling at me!" (*Big Daddy*): لا تصرخ على! "la taSrukH ʔalayy". "la taSrukH fi wajhai" لا تصرخ في وجهي ("Don't shout at me/ at my face") is more natural.
- "Her English is good" (*LMM*): لغتها الإنجليزية جيد "lughatuha il ʔinjiliiziyah/ ʔingiliiziyah jayyd". The adjective "jayyd" agrees with a singular masculine noun. In Arabic both "lughah" ("language") "ʔinjiliiziyah" ("English") are feminine. The adjective should change into "jayydah" جيدة.
- "Everything's ruined" (*Y&R*): كل شيء دمر "kullu shayʔin dummir/ kul shayʔ dummir". There is tendency in SA to use the active voice and in its colloquial varieties to use middle and ergative verbs, unless there is a strong stylistic reason for using the passive. Here are some options: كل شيء اتدمر "laqad dammar X kulla shayʔ" لقد دمر... كل شيء "kull shee? Itdammar" لقد تحطم كل شيء "laqad taHaTTam kullu shayʔ"
- "She goes to a yoga class" (*Tempted*): تحضر صف يوجا "taHDur Saff yuuga". "masaaq", "dawrah" and the loan word "koors" are more natural in the present context. تأخذ درساً أو دورة في اليوجا is more natural.

3.3.4. Literal

- "Join the club" (*LMM*): انضم معنا إلى النادي "inDam maʔana ʔila nnaadi". The Italian pop singer is amazed at the harshness of the school principal. He says she scares him. One of the students, a close friend of Lizzie's, produces the idiomatic utterance "Join the club." The subtitle misses the idiom and simply provides a literal translation. The Egyptian equivalent "baqeena fi l hawa sawa" بقينا في الهواء سوا (El-Batal, 2000: 132) which literally means "We have become in the air together" is an option.
- "You were in diapers" (*LMM*): كنت في الحفاضات "kunti fi l HafaDaat". This is Lizzie's mother seeing her off in the airport, recollecting the time when Lizzie was a kid. Now she is old enough to leave for Italy. Thus, a more natural equivalent is "kunti Tiflah" طفلة ("You were a kid").
- "before she became popular" (*LMM*): قبل أن تصبح شعبية "qabla ʔan tuSbiH shaʔbiyyah". This should be "qabla ʔan tuSbiH mashhuurah" مشهورة or "qabla ʔan tuSbiH nijmah" نجمة ("before she became famous", before she became a star). "shaʔbiyyah" has some negative associations such as "common", "banal" and "unrefined"

- "I am not a public speaker." (*CTM*) لست متحدثة عامة "lastu mutaHaddiṭah 'aamah"/ "lastu mutaHaddiṭatan 'aamah". This back-translates as "I am not a general speaker." It should have been restructured: لا أجد الحديث أمام الجمهور: "la 'ujjiidu l Hadiiṭ 'amaam il jumhuur" ("I do not know how to speak in public/ in front of an audience").
- "I am a swan that is about to kick the bucket" (*Full House*) على وشك أن اركل الدلو "ala washak 'an 'arkula ddaIw". The subtitle not only fails to capture the allusion of the swan song, but also gives a literal translation of the English idiom that means "to die".
- "Don't leave me in suspense" (*Y&R*) لا تتركني على أحر من الجمر "la tatrunki 'ala 'aHar min al jamr". This is one of the best subtitles in the entire texts mentioned here. The English expression "in suspense" could have been translated into something like "la tatrunki 'antaZir" أنتظر ("Don't leave me waiting"). Instead the subtitled added an idiomatic expression, that is very relevant and expressive, from Arabic – "'ala 'aHar min al jamr" ("on a hit tin roof").
- "You look like her sister. Two peas in a pod" (*LMM*) أنت تبدين كأختها "anti tabdiin ka 'ukhtiha". The ambiguous subtitle skips the idiomatic "two peas in a pod. Possible corrections: كما لو كنتما أختين. إنك تشبهينها تماما "kama law kuntuma 'ukhtayn 'innaki tushbihiinaha tamaman" or the idiomatic قوله وانقسمت "fuula w inqasamit" ("two halves of a bean").

3.3.5. Foul language

- F*** me! F*** me! F*** me! (*Tempted*) ضاجعني! ضاجعني! ضاجعني! "Daaji'ni". The Arabic word means "sleep with me", which is a euphemism for "have sexual intercourse with me". "She didn't have to f*** him" (*Tempted*) لم تكن مضطرة لمضاجعته "lam takun muTTara li muDaaja'tih" – "muDaajah" is the noun from the verb "Daaja'" ("He slept with"). In both cases, the English four-letter word is chunked sideways and replaced with an expression that is twice removed from obscenity. It is in SA and not exactly the word that might be used in a sexual encounter. To avoid the fun teens make of such words in Arabic subtitles, the subtitled could have simply skipped or omitted the word. The English four-letter word is all too pervasive to merit any translation. Moreover, the wife having known about the seduction plan and having decided to consciously succumb to her seducer makes herself clear enough in the seduction scene non-verbally and paralinguistically.
- A similar strategy of using SA, where a colloquial counterpart would not be acceptable, occurs also in "Big Boobs" (*Big Daddy*): كاعب "kaa'ib"; "gay" (*Big Daddy*): لوطى "luuTyy" – "Sodomite"; "queer" (*Tempted*): شاذ جنسياً "shaaz jinsiyyan" – "sexually pervert"; "I will be unable to get it up" (*Tempted*): لن اصل إلى انتصاب "lan 'aSila ila intiSaab" – "I will not be able to get an erection."
- "This kind of marital shit" (*Tempted*): هذه المسائل الزوجية "haaḍihi il masaa'il izzawjiyyah". This back-translates as "These marital affairs/ issues", which fails to capture the "shit" part of the expression. The private investigator is rejecting the husband's request to keep an eye on his wife. The investigator's attitude toward these "marital affairs" is negative and scornful. Thus, "Hamaqaat" ("follies") or "qazaaraat" ("dirt") should replace the neutral "masaa'il".
- "motherf***er" (*Tempted*) الوغد/ السافل "al waghd"/ "as-saafil" ("villain"); "shit!" (*Big Daddy*) سحقا/ تبا/ "tabban"/ "suHqan"; "suckers" (*LMM*) أغبياء "aghbiyaa?" – literally "stupid" – plural, third person; "You are going down, sucker" (*Big Daddy*) ستخسر يا أحمق

"sa takhsar ya ?aHmaq" – "You'll lose, stupid/ fool"; "God damn f***ing thief" (*Tempted*) "لص لعين liSSun la?i'in" – "contemptible thief." In these instances, the shit part is translated using SA equivalents. None of them has any erotic overtones. They are expressions of anger at someone. Thus, there is no reason why their dictionary meanings should be reactivated in the subtitles. In other cases, the f*** word is merely an interjection. It does not have a semantic load of its own. Colloquial equivalents in Arabic include varieties of "zift" – "tar", "niilah" – "mud", and so on. To invariably translate the word as "la?i'in" is simply wrong: "I am not a f***ing lawyer" (*Tempted*): "لست محاميا لعينا" "lastu muHaamiyan la?i'inan"; "Can I get a f***ing drink here" (*Tempted*): "هل لي بشراب لعين هنا" "hal li bisharaabin la?i'inin huna".

- One good option is to leave an obscene word out and the intonation in the ST will convey the emotion: "out of your f***ing mind" (*Tempted*) "فقدت صوابك" "faqadta Sawaabak" – "You lost your mind," "He happens to be pretty damn nice" (*Big Daddy*): "انتبه إلى نفسك" "innahu rajulun Tayyib" and "Watch your ass" (*Tempted*): "انتبه إلى نفسك" "intabih ?ila nafsak" – "Watch your steps/ Be careful."
- To replace a piece of shit with a categorically sacred expression is perhaps a mistake: "Why did you f***ing lie to me" (*Tempted*): "بحق السماء" "bi Haqq is-samaa?" – "for Heaven's sake" and "God damn she's beautiful" (*Tempted*): "إنها جميلة بحق السماء" "innaha jamiilah bi Haqqis-samaa?" – "By Heavens, she is beautiful."
- Sometimes the obscene word or expression is **chunked sideways**: "they don't have dicks" (*Tempted*): "لا يمتلكن أعضاء تناسلية ذكورية" "la yamlikna ?a?Daa? Tanaasuliyyah ?uukuuriyyah" – "They do not have male genitals", or **chunked up**: "sexual impulse" (*Scrubs*): "غريزة" "ghariizah", and "I cannot have intercourse with you tonight" (*Scrubs*) لا أستطيع أن أقيم علاقة معك الليلة "la ?astaTii? ?an ?uqiima ?alaaqa ma?aki l laylah" – "I cannot establish/ have a relation(ship) with you tonight."
- "You stupid son of bitch" (*Tempted*): "يا بن الكلبة الأحمق" "ya bna al kalba al ?aHmaq" – "you stupid son of bitch." The Arabic equivalent does not have the same meaning of the English expression, of a woman who is sexually available. Yet, the exact counterpart cannot be written onscreen in an Arab culture.

3.4. Discussion

Some of the problems identified above are not specific to the sample texts. There is the often-lamented, well-documented gap between modern SA and the many varieties of Colloquial Arabic spoken in Arab countries. "He pooped/ he went pooping" often translates in Arabic subtitles into "taghawwaT" ("تغوط" "He defecated"). The classical Arabic verb literally means to go to a low land so as to hide and defecate and "?al ghaa?iT" "الغائط" means a place where people defecate. The translation is accurate, but not natural. The Arabic word is in fact twice removed from reality – "tabarraz" "تبرز" which also means "defecated" is more readily understandable to an average user of, for example, Egyptian Arabic. At least it appears in medical settings where people go for a stool analysis. Another example cited above is that of "Big Boobs" subtitled as "كاعب" "kaa?ib" which literally means a female with big, full breasts. The word is very difficult to understand for an average Arab. Yet, the colloquial alternative is not a good

solution. First, it is not one, but many alternatives, as varied as the different varieties of Arabic. Second, it would be offensive.

Thus, there are economic-linguistic as well as ideological reasons for subtitling in SA. Using a standard word for something that would sound offensive or obscene in its colloquial version takes of most of its obscenity. Moreover, SA is the only guarantee a text might be accessible to all Arabs. Colloquial varieties of Arabic still lack the codification and orthographic systematicity necessary for being used in writing. Notwithstanding the many problems in teaching SA at Arab schools and universities, the dramatic deterioration of media people and graduates at large as far as writing in SA is concerned and the increasing shift to English in domains stereotypically associated with Arabic, the association between Arabic, Classical and Standard, with Islamic Arab identity is still strong.

The function of SA as means of couching obscenity should be emphasized. We have seen that at least two of the sample texts – *Tempted* and *Big Daddy* – are obscene and profane enough to merit a lot of distancing and reformulation. The "obscenities" therein cannot be subtitled into any variety of colloquial Arabic, for the reasons already mentioned above and also for the strong censorship thereon in Arab TV and cinema. Censorship on obscenity and swearing has always existed in every community. In an Arab context, more specifically in Egyptian cinema, the most important areas "kept under state censorship are religion, sexuality and politics." The 1976 Egyptian censorship law forbids, among other things, "obscene and indecent speech" (Shafik, 2001: 33). Censorship on obscenity remained very strong even in countries as liberal as the USA, France and Spain. "Relaxation" of such censorship is very recent: late 1960s for the United States; mid-1970s for the United Kingdom, France and Spain. In the United States and Germany it is now "constitutionally illegal to censor films," even though censorship may operate in the form of content rating (Hayward, 2000: 54). The existence and scope of censorship is not simply an issue of how democratic or how unthreatened a country is; it is also an issue of how distant religion and state are from each other in that country.

In Western, particularly US, movies, there seems to be a continuous increase in **swearing** - "cursing," "dirty words," "profanity," "bawdy" and "foul" language, "obscenity," and "cussing" – a very long list. Overall, restrictions over profanity seem to be decreasing while swearing increases in everyday discourse, movies as well as on television. (Kaye and Sapolsky, 2001). It is no longer the profanity of what is repressed or forbidden; it is the profanity "of the visible, of the all-too-visible, of the more visible-than-the-visible" (Baudrillard, 1983: 126, cited in Chin, 2004: 45). These generalizations should be qualified and located within a socio-historical context.

The "pervasive language" of the movies, even their "brief language," Wood (2000, WWW) argues, "has gone a long way towards thinning out the cultural barriers that gave cursing its real power. Once it is everywhere, it ceases to matter." A more profound development has occurred, not at the level of pervasiveness of curse and swearing utterances, but at the level of their

pragmatic functions. In a comprehensive study of the subjectification of cursing and swearing from Old to Present-Day English, Arnocick (2000) points out that the discourse genre of cursing has undergone a "transformation of desiderative wish into expletive expressive." Unlike the traditional, deontic, declarative cursing which has religious and spiritual roots, cursing today "does not base itself in a spiritual or religious institution." The "profane curser", or anyone who happens to use expletives and obscenities, "may intend no blasphemy." To yell, to shout "Damn you," for example, requires "the psychological state of anger rather than desire for divine retribution" (p. 90).

It is true that "obscenities" proliferate in many classical Arabic treatises and pamphlets and fable books – the "uncut" *Arabian Nights* is a good example. Some of the most dignified classical Arab scholars discuss sex openly and talk about sexual positions, genitalia and sexual diseases and so on. Yet, whether the words they used were regarded as obscene or not should be further explored. For it is the way a word is perceived in speech or writing rather than how it is defined in a dictionary that counts. Most such classical works are banned today: you hear of them but you never really find them in their uncut versions. It is also true that obscenity and swearing can be found almost everywhere in Arab teen and underground text and talk – in toilets, in SMS texts on TV, in Internet chat forums and mailing lists. Yet, mainstream media in Arab countries do not admit obscenity or swearing unless "filtered" or "slant." Slanting occurs in the form of resorting to SA and the different ways of chunking that have been mentioned above. In another context – in the translation of pop fiction – it may take the form of complete avoidance or omission (El-Bataaynah, 2003: 248-249). Double entendres and innuendos, suggestive looks and smiles, erotic dancing and body language and symbolic representations of sex, e.g., inserting a money note in an ATM in a commercial for Viagra, are pervasive in today's cinema and private TV in the Arab world. Yet, the Arabic language used does not seem to have changed as rapidly.

In subtitling a ST where there is an instance of obscenity or swearing, the subtitler should take the following into account: the status of the TC in international context, the relation between the TC and the SC, the cultural restrictions on translators, clients' intentions and requirements and the flexibility of target culture and its linguistic policies (Oltra-Ripoll, 2005: 89-90). To be honest to the ST under these constraints is a difficult task. Yet, honesty does not seem the most important issue in translating – at least not when rigidly defined. "Attitudes are gradually changing, and in today's translation studies the status of key concepts such as equivalence and faithfulness are being more and more questioned" (Oittinen, 2000: 8). Important factors to consider when thriving to achieve equivalence include the reasons for and the ultimate goals of translating – to get enough knowledge of a SC or to replace a TT with a SC – and the context of the ST and the TT. We have seen that many of the obscenities in the STs are not really obscene and there is no reason why they should be subtitled "obscenely." Yet, subtitlers of English movies into Arabic should be more creative so that they do not get stuck with a list of "shit" and "f****" equivalents.

The SA gambits should be relaxed so that they become accessible to an average viewer.

Other problems in the sample subtitles – formality, literal translations, insensitivity to context of utterance and context of culture and ungrammaticality or unnaturalness – simply require more rigorous training on English-to-Arabic translation in general and English-to-Arabic subtitling in particular. The strategies and skills discussed in the introductory part of this study could be used as a model or frame of reference in doing such training. Moreover, mastery of Arabic – a prerequisite for the training - and familiarity with the STs and their contexts are two important starting points in doing English-to-Arabic subtitling. It is a sad reality that some subtitlers, especially of pirated DVDs, never happen to watch a movie and simply subtitle from a script. (Many of those subtitlers are not native speakers of Arabic.) This may account for many problems identified above under the subheadings of Context and Literal translation. It sounds absurd to attempt subtitling a movie without exposure to its non-verbal aspects. Yet, this must be a minor concern for DVD pirates whose only goal is money.

4. Conclusion

The present study examines a sample of Arabic subtitles on English movies and TV dramas. It has identified and accounted for some patterns of mistakes and errors in these subtitles and provided some suggestions for fixing such subtitling problems. The problems identified in the sample subtitles have to do with using a formal expression where a non-formal one normally sounds more Arabic, using an expression that is ungrammatical, inaccurate, or unnatural, insensitivity to the context of utterance or of culture in the ST and failure to capture idiomatic meanings. Many of these problems can be avoided through adequate training – including more training in Arabic grammar. Some can only be fixed by understanding the context and the culture of the ST.

Subtitling is a multi-layered and multi-semiotic mode of translation, which makes it a very good resource for foreign language teachers: the interdependence of text and context, of the verbal and the non-verbal, the issues of formality and informality and literal vs. functional, idiomatic translation, the shift from a written script to a spoken text and then to written subtitles and the treatment of foul language in different cultures and contexts. This nature of subtitling also makes it an important and interesting research topic. It is hoped that subtitling receive more research and educational attention in Arab universities. Research questions that may be addressed include subtitlers' educational and cultural background and preferred strategies, viewers' perception of subtitling, subtitling as an intersemiotic activity, subtitling in relation to film or TV drama genres and the historical context of production and reception of subtitles, to give only a partial list of topics.

Notes

¹The following notes on the three movies are adapted from **Yahoo!Movies** and **www.hollywood.com**. Denis Dugan's *Big Daddy* (1999), also entitled *Guy Gets Kid*, story and screenplay by Steve Franks, starring Adam Sandler as Sonny Koufax, Joey Lauren Adams as Layla Maloney and Jon Stewart as Kevin Gerrity, rated PG 13 for rough language and some crude humor, is about a young man – Sonny – who is abandoned by his girlfriend for lack of ambition and inability to move ahead. A day later he has a five year old at his doorstep – the unknown son of Sonny's friend Kevin. In an attempt to show how responsible he is, Sonny lies to the social security guy and takes the kid – Julian – in as his own son. Over the time together, Sonny begins to love Julian and it becomes hard when the authorities eventually find out he is not who he claims to be.

- Bill Bennett's *Tempted* (2001), rated PG 18 distributed by Gold Circle Films, starring Burt Reynolds as husband, Saffron Burrows as wife and Peter Facinelli as lover is about Charlie Le Blanc, a rich man in New Orleans, who finds out he does not have much longer to live, so he sets out to test the faithfulness of his beautiful young wife to see if she deserves his fortune by offering a handsome young man, Jimmy, a large sum of money to seduce his wife. The wife knows about the conspiracy and starts planning to get rid of the husband using the lover. Things get out of control and everyone gets into the swamp: the husband and the lover's best friend are killed and the wife arrested. *Tempted* is much more daring than *Big Daddy*, as far as sexuality and language are concerned.

- Jim Fall's *The Lizzie McGuire Movie*, a Walt Disney Picture, is about Lizzie McGuire (Hilary Duff) and her schoolmates who leave Disney's Los Angeles studio for a class trip to Italy. In Rome, Lizzie is mistaken for a famous pop star named Isabella and she is asked to play the role of the singer at a huge Italian music award show. It turns out Isabella had agreed to perform at the ceremony but backed out at the last minute, leaving her singing partner Paolo (Yani Gellman) in a legal problem. Lizzie agrees in part because she has a crush on Paolo and spends the rest of the trip preparing for the show. This is, at least in part, a movie about change, maturing and the transition from middle school to high school.

- *Scrubs* is a serial that features a number of doctors in a hospital environment. The examples that appear below are taken from the episode of May 20, 2005 on One TV. Some other examples are taken from the movie *Child to Many* (CTM), Bahrain TV, Saturday, May 28, 22.00. The subtitles were done by the AEPD, Amman, Jordan. The example from the *Full House* serial is taken from the episode of Friday, May 27, 2005, MBC3. A few examples are taken from the American TV drama serial *The Young and the Restless* (Y&R) – One TV, Sunday May 29, 2005, 17.00 – and one from *A Wedding Story*, One TV, Sunday May 29, 2005, 03.00. This is a list of the sources actually used in the study. Almost every one familiar with English in the Arab world has his/her own list of "corrupt" subtitles. These cannot be cited here because they are regrettably intractable.

Transcription conventions

/ʔ/ voiceless glottal stop; /θ/ inter-dental voiceless fricative; /j/ voiced palatal fricative; /ħ/ voiceless pharyngeal fricative; /kħ/ voiceless uvular fricative; /ð/ Inter-dental voiced fricative; /sh/ voiceless palatal fricative; /S/ voiceless pharyngealized fricative; /D/ voiced pharyngealized plosive; /T/ voiceless pharyngealized plosive; /Z/ voiced pharyngealized fricative; /ʕ/ voiced pharyngeal fricative; /gh/ voiced uvular fricative; /q/ voiceless uvular plosive; /w/ voiced bilabial semi-vowel; /y/ voiced palatal semi-vowel.

Long vowels and geminate consonants are shown by doubling the relevant symbol. The symbol * stands for one letter in a four-letter word.

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