

The Subtitling of Taboo Language: A Cultural Study of Selected English and French Movies Subtitled into Arabic

Professor Nevine Sarwat

*Institute of Applied Linguistics and Translation, Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University
nevine.sarwat@alexu.edu.eg*

Ayten Adel

*Institute of Applied Linguistics and Translation, Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University
ayten.adel@pua.edu.eg*

ABSTRACT

The current study attempts to tackle the problematics of subtitling of taboo language of American films subtitled into Arabic. This study particularly deals with the English film “My Dirty Grandpa” and “Madame Claude” on Netflix and their Arabic subtitling. The study approaches its object of study utilizing Battistella’s (2005), Schjoldager’s (2008) Allan and Burrige (2006) models as a framework. The study aims to examine the taboo language utilized in American films subtitled into Arabic according to Battistella’s (2005) model. The current study also aims to describe Schjoldager’s (2008) strategies that are adopted in subtitling taboo language of American films subtitled into Arabic.

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to investigate how translators address Arab audience’s society and culture to translate taboo language of American films subtitled into Arabic according to Allan and Burrige (2006)’s model. The results reveal that English and French films utilize different types of taboo language to express their culture. The results also reveal that translators utilize different subtitling strategies to deliver the cultural meanings of the American original text to Arab audience. As a result, translators attempt to bridge the cultural gap between the source language and the target text to address Arab audience’s culture and society.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The current study looks on the issues of taboo language subtitling in the English film “My Dirty Grandpa,” and the French film “Madam Claude” as well as their Arabic translations. Because of the limits of subtitling, there is a greater loss in subtitling than there is in written translation (Bogucki, 2004). Speech characteristics are lost while switching from speech to writing mode. As a result, the translator’s ability to change from what is being said to what is written at the bottom of the screen is crucial.

METHODOLOGY

Taboo language, or objectionable language, is classified into four sorts, according to Battistella (2005, p.72), and manifests itself in the following ways:

- 1) Epithet
- 2) Impoliteness
- 3) Vulgarity
- 4) Obscenity

The current study applies Schjoldager, Gottlieb and Klitgard (2008) model of analysis which consists of twelve strategies that translators can use while subtitling audio visual texts. According to Schjoldager et al. (2008, p.89), there are two main categories: a) macro strategies and b) micro strategies and each category works on a specific level of translation. The twelve strategies manifest themselves in the following:

- 1) Direct transfer
- 2) Calque
- 3) Direct translation
- 4) Oblique translation
- 5) Explication
- 6) Paraphrase
- 7) Condensation
- 8) Adaptation
- 9) Addition
- 10) Substitution

- 11) Deletion
- 12) Permutation

Keith Allan and Kate Burridge (2006)’s Politeness and Impoliteness Perspective:

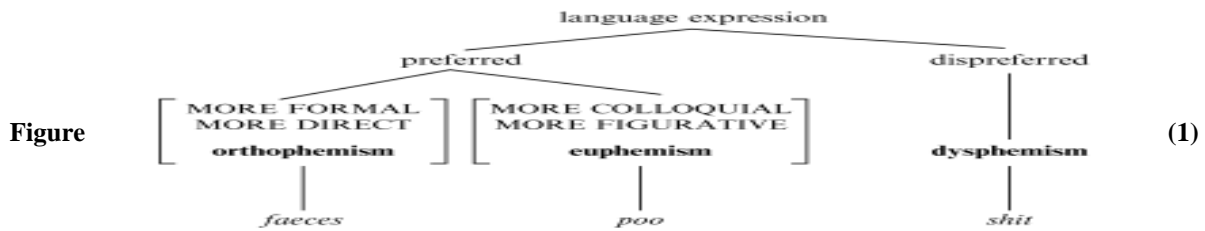
Allan and Burridge (2006,p.29) stated that the discussions of taboo and language censorship naturally lead to discussions of politeness and impoliteness, as well as their interactions with the three strategies that manifest themselves in the following:

- 1) Euphemism (sweet talking)
- 2) Dysphemism (offensive speech)
- 3) Orthophemism (straight talking)

It is worth noting that the phrase euphemism (Greek eu 'good, well' and pHEME'speaking') is widely-known, whereas dysphemism (Greek dys-'bad, unfavourable') is rarely used in everyday speech. We invented the word orthophemism (Greek ortho- 'proper, straight, normal,' cf. orthodox) to describe straightforward or neutral phrases that are neither sweet-sounding, evasive, or too courteous (euphemistic), nor harsh, rude, or offensive (harsh, blunt, or offensive) (dysphemistic).To make things easier, we've coined the word X-phemism to refer to the entire collection of euphemisms, orthophemisms, and dysphemisms.To clarify the distinction between orthophemism and euphemism, consider the following:

- 1) An orthophemism differs from a euphemism in that it is more formal and direct (or literal).
- 2) A euphemism is usually more informal and metaphorical (or indirect) than its orthophemism counterpart.
- 3) Dysphemisms, like euphemisms, are more informal and metaphorical than orthophemisms

As a result, we propose that X-phemisms (the sum of orthophemisms, euphemisms, and dysphemisms) are linked. The current study utilizes the following figure that X-phemisms model by Allan and Burridge’(2006)



**X-phemisms Model by Allan and Burridge (2006)
ANALYSIS**

French Source Text	Arabic Target Text	Translation Strategy	Explanation/ Quality assessment
Que la plupart des homes nous traitent comme <u>des putes</u> (Madame Claude Film) 2021	ادركت مبكرا ان الرجال يعاملوننا كعاهرات	Direct translation and euphemistic strategy (formal target text)	The translator translated the word directly to keep the translation faithful and deliver the same taste of the original.At the same time, the translator decided to euphemize the word “putes” and utilizes “عاهرات”to address Arab viewers culture. The subtitler decided to change the taboo word of the source text in a formal way because viewers could be family members who expect to read euphemistic translation for taboo words.
Qu'est ce qu'il y a ? <u>Putain de merde</u>	ماذا هناك؟ اللعنة	Euphemistic expression	The translator utilized of translating using a less expressive term to translate the word "putain de merde” In other words, the translator switches to a more formal word that, in contrast to the insult, is acceptable to the intended audience.
De <u>ta bite</u> .quetufourres partout	فضيبك الذى تدخله فى كل مكان	Direct translation and formal language	The translator translated the word directly to keep the translation honest. The subtitler tends to deliver the same taste of the source text. At the same time, the translator decided to euphemize the word “ta bite” by using modern standard Arabic to translate the word to Arab audience politely.

Ah si! Tue s un <u>pute</u> <u>pute</u>	بلى انت عاهر _____	Omission and euphemism	The subtitler tends to omit the word “pute” because it was repeated. Also, the translator euphemized it by using the word “عاهر” instead which a formal word to respect the culture of Arab audience.
French Source Text	Arabic Target Text	Translation Strategy	Explanation/ Quality assessment
<u>Un sale con</u>	الحقير	Omission and substitution	The omission of the source text affected the target text, but at the same time the translator addresses Arab audience culture and society. The omission of the source text word made the translation sounds unnatural, however, the subtitling aims to respect the Arab audience culture and society by toning down taboo language.
English Source Text	Arabic Target Text	Translation Strategy	Explanation/ Quality assessment
Old woman <u>fucking</u> murdered like that. (Dirty Grand pa Film) 2017	امرأة عجوز تقتل هكذا _____	Omission	The omission of the source text affected the target text, but at the same time the translator addresses Arab audience culture and society. The omission of the source text word made the translation sounds unnatural, however, the subtitling aims to respect the Arab audience culture and society by toning down taboo language.
You <u>motherfucker</u>	اللعنه	Euphemism and Substitution	The translator decided to euphemize the word “motherfucker” and utilizes “اللعنه” to address Arab viewers culture. The subtitler decided to change the taboo word of the source text in a formal way because viewers could be family members who expect to read euphemistic translation for taboo words.
You’re not well because your wife just <u>died</u>	أنت لا تشعر بالتحسن بسبب وفاة زوجتك	substitution	The translator decided here to substitute the word “died” with “passaway” in order to respect the audience’s culture. Arabs tends to use “passaway” which is “وفاه” instead of “died” which “مات” because it is less offensive and euphemized. The subtitler tend to substitute the words to respect Arab audience’s culture.
Out of my way, <u>buttfuckers!</u>	ابتعدوا عن الطريق، أيها الأوغاد	Euphemism	The euphemism aims to tone down taboo language of the source text. The euphemism of the source text word made the translation sounds unfaithful, but, the subtitling aims to respect the Arab audience culture
I have one <u>fucking</u> month left, Dick!	تبقى لي شهر واحد لعين يا (ديك)	Adaptation	The adaptation of the source text affected the target text, but at the same time the translator addresses Arab audience culture. The adaptation of the source text word made the translation sounds unnatural, but, the subtitling aims to tone down taboo language.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This research aims to determine the translation methodologies and taboo language categories used to depict banned phrases that may offend Arab audiences. As a result, the subtitling procedures used to render prohibited terms did not provide a perfect counterpart, but they did aid to convey content in order to address Arab culture. To make the English film "My Dirty Grandpa," and the French Film “Madame Claude” accessible, several subtitling procedures were used, and they were euphemized to address Arab audience culture and society.

REFERENCES

- Abdelaal, N. M. (2019). Subtitling of culture-bound terms: strategies and quality assessment. *Heliyon*, 5(4), e01411.
- Al-Khanji, R., El-Shiyab, S., & Hussein, R. (2000). On the use of compensatory strategies in simultaneous interpretation. *Meta: Journal des traducteurs/Meta: Translators' Journal*, 45(3), 548-557.
- Allan, K., & Burridge, K. (2006). *Forbidden words: Taboo and the censoring of language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Al-Qinai, J. (2000). Translation quality assessment. Strategies, parameters and procedures. *Meta: journal des traducteurs/Meta: Translators' Journal*, 45(3), 497-519.
- Altahri, A. (2013). Issues and strategies of subtitling cultural references Harry Potter movies in Arabic (Doctoral dissertation, University of Salford).
- Alwan, N. (2011). Subtitling and cultural representation: the case of Freej (Doctoral dissertation).
- Battistella, E. (2005). *Bad language: are some words better than others?*. Oxford University Press.
- Borden, A. W. (2007). The impact of service-learning on ethnocentrism in an intercultural communication course. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 30(2), 171-183.
- Borodo, M. (2015). Multimodality, translation and comics. *Perspectives*, 23(1), 22-41.
- Cauldwell, R. T. (2000). Where did the anger go? The role of context in interpreting emotion in speech. In ISCA Tutorial and Research Workshop (ITRW) on Speech and Emotion.
- Cintas, J. D. (Ed.). (2008). *The didactics of audiovisual translation* (Vol. 77). John Benjamins Publishing.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. SAGE publications.
- Elkateb, S. (2016). English Vs. Arabic Culture-Specific Concepts (CSCs). *University Bulletin*, 18(1), 226-247.
- Gamal, M. Y. (2008). Egypt's audiovisual translation scene. *Arab Media and Society*, 5, 1-15.
- Gambier, Y. (2006, May). Multimodality and audiovisual translation. In *MuTra 2006-Audiovisual Scenarios: Conference Proceedings* (pp. 1-8).
- Kaindl, K. (2013). Multimodality and translation. In *The Routledge handbook of translation studies* (pp. 275-288). Routledge.
- Khalaf, A. S., & Rashid, S. (2016). Attenuating Obscenity of Swearwords in the Amateur Subtitling of English Movies into Arabic. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Volume*, 7.
- Pedersen, J. (2005, May). How is culture rendered in subtitles. In *MuTra 2005-Challenges of Multidimensional Translation: Conference Proceedings* (pp. 1-18).
- Schjoldager, A. (2008). *Understanding translation*. Academica.