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Subtitling of culture-bound terms: strategies and quality assessment

Noureldin Mohamed Abdelaal*

English and Translation Section, Department of Foreign Languages, University of Nizwa, Birkat Al Mouz, Nizwa, Oman

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: nourabdelal@yahoo.com (N.M. Abdelaal).

Abstract

Subtitling, one of the under-researched topics in translation studies, is a challenging task faced by many restrictions that compel subtitlers to use specific strategies to enhance the quality of the subtitles. In relation to this, this study aimed to identify the subtitling strategies adopted in subtitling the culture-bound terms in the American movie entitled ‘The American Pie’, and to assess the quality of the translation of these terms. For this purpose, the data was collected from the movie and qualitatively analyzed using Pedersen’s (2005, 2011) typology and Pedersen’s (2017) quality assessment model. The results of the study showed that most of the strategies proposed by Pedersen were used. It was also found that some other translation strategies were used in the subtitles. Two new subtitling strategies were identified by the author, viz., using euphemistic expressions and using formal language to render informal language. The quality assessment showed that most subtitles are of a good quality, as in few cases there were some serious errors or problems.

Keyword: Linguistics

1. Introduction

Subtitles are one of the important areas of translation studies. In this regard, subtitles refer to texts that appear on the screen either in the same language of the audio-visual work (i.e. intralingual subtitling) or in another target language (i.e. interlingual subtitling). Subtitling should not, however, be confused with other audiovisual translation types such as dubbing. Baker and Hochel (2001) note that dubbing is an oral translation activity that makes use of the acoustic channel in screen translation. However, subtitling is a visual translation activity that involves superimposition of a written text onto the screen. Subtitling is a process which entails technically transferring a SL movie or audiovisual media to a TL movie or audiovisual media, synchronized with the original verbal message (Gottlieb, 2004). According to O'Connell (2007), subtitling is "supplementing the original voice soundtrack by adding written text on screen" (p.169). As Ghaemi and Benyamin (2010) note subtitling overweighs dubbing in terms of cost. Subtitling is less costly and it can at the same time convey the SL audiovisual products (Kapsaskis, 2008). Diaz Cintas and Anderman (2009) state that subtitling has some characteristics that make it stand out from the other types of translations. One of these characteristics is the economy of subtitling due to the limited space available on the screen, and which should not hinder seeing the screen well. Ivarsson (1992) mentioned that the linguistic diversity and cultural awareness of the target audience should be considered when doing the job of subtitling.

Subtitling, however, is a demanding cognitive process that is loaded with problems and difficulties (Karamitroglou, 2000), and formal quantitative and textual qualitative challenges (Gottlieb, 1992). Formal constraints are seen in terms of the space limits, which is a maximum of 2 lines and 35 characters, while textual constraints and challenges can be viewed in terms of the visual context of the film. There are many technical problems in subtitling such as the average reading speed of the viewers. Another constraint is the synchronization process that is required to keep constant minimum interval between subtitles. Some suggest that the reading speed of a viewer is around 150 to 180 words per minute, and which may differ based on the lexical density and the linguistic information presented in text (De Linde and Kay, 1999: 6, Luyken et al., 1991: 43f). Subtitles of two lines should be displayed for no more than 6 seconds so as not to cause duplicate reading. It is also suggested that short subtitles be exposed for at least 1.5 seconds to avoid a flashing effect (Zojer, 2011). Zojer also argues that one of the challenges encountered by subtitlers is the visual cuts, as a subtitle should not be retained on a screen during a shot change. Instead, a clear margin should be left on either side of the visual cuts. Such a need for being economic in terms of subtitles requires intended omissions (Luyken et al., 199).

Malenova (2015) claims that there are several restrictions in the process of subtitling. These restrictions are normative restrictions, social restrictions, personal restrictions, and physiological restrictions. Normative restrictions are related to the problem of finding the appropriate equivalents of the ST words in the TT. Social restrictions include lexical items and expressions related to culture (e.g. religious terms, ethical terms). Personal restrictions are about how the translator sees the world and which might affect “some unique variants of translation, and to making crucial mistakes” (Malenova, 2015, p.2893). Physiological restrictions are related to the human perception and the cognitive processes during the subtitling process which make some subtitlers differ from others in terms of perception and comprehension. These physiological restrictions emerge as a result of different factors such as the code of subtitling that imposes some restrictions and rules on the subtitlers, spacing allowed, and many other.

Zojer (2011) argues that the job of the subtitler entails also predicting the ST. A subtitler may need to omit some parts of the ST intentionally. One example of the omitted units in subtitling is cohesive devices, as they are thought not to carry meaning though they are important for text comprehension and coherence. One of the elements that subtitlers tend to omit in translation is referential cohesion (e.g. personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns) because they think that they don't carry meaning. However, Zojer (2011, p.401) argues that deletion of such devices can affect meaning, and she quotes an example from *Operah Winfrey Show* as follows:

Speech: It's what I call the vicious cycle syndrome. You start with drug A and then they put you on drug B, and drug C, and pretty soon you are taking a handful of pills, all because of the first drug.

Subtitle: It's a vicious cycle. You start with drug A, then drug B, then soon you are taking a handful of drugs.

As seen in the subtitle, the fact that taking such a handful of drugs was omitted in the subtitle causing misinformation. Zojer also mentioned that subtitlers tend to carry out simplification of syntax to save space on the screen. Another challenge in translating audiovisual movies is the fact that a spoken text is changed to a written text, which stipulates different stylistic and structural features. Written texts also show higher lexical density in comparison to spoken texts (Zojer, 2011). Further, those written texts should have the flavor of a spoken language.

One of the strenuous tasks for a subtitler is translating cultural references. Cultural references are always related to culture-specific contexts such as geography, sociolinguistic aspects, and history, among others. Foreman (1992) as cited in Narváez (2015) puts it that cultural references do not only include culture-bound terms but they also include signs, gestures, symbols among many others. Mayoral and Muñoz (1997) as

cited in [Narváez \(2015\)](#) argue that these words can even be labeled as culturally marked segments. [Nedergaard-Larsen \(1993\)](#) postulates that cultural references include geography, history, society and culture. [Ramière \(2004\)](#) proposed three types of cultural references, viz., sociocultural, historical and extralinguistic references. [Vandeweghe \(2005\)](#) uses the concept of cultural references to include geographical, ethnographic and socio-political references. [Díaz Cintas and Remael \(2007\)](#) use the expression culture-bound terms to refer to cultural references.

Translating such culture-bound terms is challenging on all levels. However, the challenge is higher when it comes to subtitling. Unlike other forms of written translation, subtitling does not allow at hand solutions for the untranslatable terms. In the other forms of translation, footnotes, glosses, and many other translation strategies can be applied to explicate some culture-bound terms. However, in subtitling all such methods are not available ([Zojer, 2011](#)). Cultural references can be in different forms such as sociolect, dialect and slang ([Zojer, 2011](#)). Another problem in subtitling is the lack of theory. Zojer postulates that there is a lack of theory in subtitling. [Zojer \(2011\)](#) puts it as follows:

due to the enormous restrictions involved in the subtitling process and the shortened and often radically changed outcome, the status of subtitling as a ‘proper’ translation has not yet been universally accepted. The — as yet — undefined status of subtitling is not helped by the fact that in a ‘normal’ translation a word, sentence, paragraph or whole text in one language is replaced by a word, sentence, paragraph or text in another language. Subtitling, however, leaves the original almost perfectly intact and only interferes with it by translating part of what is spoken into a subtitle and by adding it on to the picture (p.400)

In short, translating cultural references constitutes a big challenge for translators, and therefore, appropriate strategies need to be adopted. In this regard, [Nedergaard-Larsen \(1993\)](#) proposed several strategies to translate such terms. These strategies include verbatim transfer, culturally neutral explicitation, paraphrase, target language adaptation. In similar vein, [Tomaszkiewicz \(2001\)](#) proposed omission, transfer direct, adaptation, substitution as translation strategies. Similarly, [Pederson \(2005, 2017\)](#) recommends official equivalent, retention, specification, explicitation, addition, direct translation, generalization, substitution and omission as translation strategies. [Zojer \(2011\)](#), however, criticized Nedergaard-Larsen, Tomasziewicz, and Pederson for dealing with cultural references in subtitles the same way they dealt with written texts, which is not the case.

One problem with translating cultural references is decoding the ST meaning, as it is sometimes difficult to figure out the meaning of the ST subtitles. Another problem is sometimes the ambiguity, and lack of coherence of some verbal texts such as

speeches, and which need to be rendered either faithfully (and hence the translation will sound ambiguous) or communicatively (and hence the translation will sound unfaithful to the ST (Zojer, 2011). Other problems of translating cultural references include the emotive words, which need to be rendered alertly. In addition to this, cultural customs and traditions sometimes count a lot.

In spite of the challenges in subtitling, some (e.g. Ivarsson, 1992; Zojer, 2011; Furgani, 2016) argue that research on subtitling is lacking. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the translation strategies adopted in translating cultural references or culture-bound terms in one of the famous adult movies, viz., *The American Pie*, and to assess the quality of the translation of these terms. In this research the expressions culture-bound terms and cultural references are used interchangeably.

2. Theory

Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007) propose six strategies for translating cultural references or cultural bound terms, in their words. These strategies are:

1. Transposition: in transposition, the ST cultural items are subtitled into equivalent TT cultural concepts. For example, translating “girlfriend” as مخطوبة (fiancée). The TT item may not be equivalent to the ST idiom but it sounds culturally acceptable in the target language.
2. Calque or literal translation: this is a literal translation accompanied with little changes. For example, translating ‘she screamed when she saw the snake’ as لقد صرخت عند رؤيتها الثعبان
3. Explication: in this strategy, the subtitler attempts to explain the ST cultural item in a way that makes it comprehensible and accessible by the target audience. For example, translating ‘baby shower’ as هدايا لطفل يولد قريبا (gifts for an expected baby).
4. Cultural adaptation: there are three types of cultural adaptation that are explained below.
 - a. Limited universalization: in this case, a subtitler replaces a ST culture-bound item with another cultural item from the source language which is more common and accessible for the target language viewers. For example translating “hit the nail on the head” as ‘right on’, and which is equivalent to دقيقا أو صائبا (accurate or precise)
 - b. Absolute universalization: in this case, a subtitler replaces the SL culture-bound item with another neutral item that conveys the meaning of the ST expression. For example translating ‘black sheep’ as التافه أو العار (petty or dishonor)

- c. Cultural substitution or naturalization: in this case, a subtitler replaces the SL culture-bound item with another TL cultural item that conveys a similar meaning of the ST item. For example, translating “it is raining cats and dogs” as إنها تمطر كأفواه القرب (it is raining like the openings of a jar)
5. Generalizations: in this case, a subtitler decides to use a hypernym for a ST word in the target language. For example, translating gays or lesbians as شواذ (eccentrics)
6. Loan: this can happen with names that are transferred to the TL. For example, subtitling ‘John’ as جون

Pedersen (2011) proposed model, which is deemed as the most comprehensive one for translating culture bound terms (Horbacauskiene et al., 2016). Pedersen proposed six strategies that are classified into ST-oriented strategies and TT-oriented strategies. The ST-oriented strategies are:

1. Retention: it occurs when the culture-bound term is rendered into the target language completely (complete retention) or slightly adapted (TL-adjusted). It is the most faithful strategy to the ST as it renders the ST term completely to the TT (Pedersen, 2005). This strategy is mostly in translating nouns.
2. Specification: it is divided up into addition and completion, and this occurs when the culture-bound term is left without translation, and it is then indicated by adding more information. This can happen through explicitation or addition. Explicitation occurs for the purpose of rendering some implicit meaning explicit or explicating a shortened name or acronym. This can take place in translating acronyms or names by adding first or last name to clarify the meaning (Pedersen, 2005). Addition happens when the translator adds some information that is latent to the ST for clarification purpose.
3. Direct translation: this is used for translating names of institutions and common names (Pedersen, 2005). It is in a word-for-word translation, which is subdivided into calque and shifted. Calque is kind of exotism that conveys intact literal translation.

As for TT-oriented strategies, they are:

1. Generalization (superordinate term or paraphrase): it occurs when the culture-bound term is rendered less specifically in the TT than it is in the ST. In other words, the ST expression is rendered into a more general term. This involves the use of hypernyms and hyponyms. This is similar to addition, as in addition we use hypernyms while in generalization hyponyms will be used.
2. Substitution (cultural or situational): it happens when a ST culture-bound term is replaced by a TT culture-bound term.

3. Omission: it happens when the ST culture-bound term is omitted and not rendered to the TT.

Another purpose of this research is to assess the quality of the subtitles. [Bittner \(2011\)](#) posits that it is really difficult to assess the quality of translation in general and the subtitles in particular. He claims that there are six factors that affect the quality of subtitles, viz., text form, culture, translator, source text (ST), politics and client. He further claims that translation quality should be viewed in terms of more or less appropriate, from the perspective of its readers or viewers. He defines the good quality in translation as “the perception of a translation as most appropriate within the context in which it functions” (p.78).

Quality assessment of translation has always been the concern of translation scholars. Among the most famous assessment proposed models are those of [Katherine Reiss \(1971\)](#) and [Julianne House \(1981, 1997, 2015\)](#). [Reiss \(1971\)](#) views translation as a process of producing a text in the TT, which is functionally equivalent to the ST. Katherina Reiss looked at a text as operating at the level of communication. She borrowed Buhlerl’s of the classification of language functions. Reiss relates language functions to their corresponding language ‘dimensions’ and to the text types or communicative situations in which they are used. However, Reiss has not explained how language functions and STs Types and the level of delicacy can be determined ([House, 2001](#)).

[House \(2015\)](#) also proposed a quality assessment model that was first introduced in 1981 and revised in 1997 and recently in 2015. Her model draws on the Hallidayan Systemic Functional Theory. It is simply based on analyzing parts of the ST and parts of the target text (TT) in terms of register and genre. However, it seems that the two models are general and seem to be applied to the assessment of subtitling.

In this regard, [Gottlieb \(2001\)](#) argues that to assess the quality of a certain subtitling, the translation of each verbal segment of a film must be analyzed in terms of its stylistic and semantic values. For the purpose of the current study, Pedersen’s Model is considered more appropriate because it is tailored for the assessment of interlingual subtitling in particular.

[Pedersen \(2017\)](#) proposes a quality assessment model which he calls FAR. FAR stands for “Functional equivalence (do the subtitles convey speaker meaning?); Acceptability (do the subtitles sound correct and natural in the target language?); and Readability (can the subtitles be read in a fluent and non-intrusive way?).” (p.210). Before elaborating on this model, it will be useful to embark on what Pedersen called as ‘contract of illusion’, a term that was basically guided by Romero Fresco’s work on the suspension of belief. Put clearer, the audience of an audiovisual work pretend to be reading the actual dialogue of the work, though they know that this is not real. They are just reading a partial translation of some representations of

the ST. In return, the subtitlers help their audience suspend their disbelief by being unobtrusive; they tend to translate in a way that makes them unnoticed (Pedersen, 2017). Back to the FAR Model, the three parameters that are used to test the quality of translation, viz., functional equivalence, acceptability and readability, are based on an error analysis typology. Errors are classified into ‘minor’, ‘standard’ or ‘serious’ errors, whereby he proposed scores in the Model, which are 0.25, 0.5, and 1, respectively. Minor errors are the type of errors that can go unnoticed unless the viewers are very attentive. Standard errors, on the other hand, are errors that can break the contract of illusion and ruin the subtitles for most viewers. Serious errors are errors that do not only affect the subtitles with the errors but they affect the subtitles to come and take time for viewers to rid of them. In the next lines, the FAR Model components (see Fig. 1 for details) are unpacked.

Pragmatic equivalence is argued to be the most appropriate type of equivalence in subtitling because of the time and space constraints (Gottlieb, 2001 Pedersen, 2005, 2017). Pedersen (2017) postulates that if the meaning is conveyed without rendering the verbatim of what is said, this should not be considered as an error. In contrast, if what is said is subtitled without conveyance of the meaning, it will be deemed an error. Pedersen argues that equivalence errors in his model are subdivided into two types: semantic errors and stylistic errors.

According to Pedersen, the penalty points for semantic equivalence are minor: 0.5, standard: 1, and serious: 2. Minor errors are lexical errors which do not affect the plot of the movie or the principal meaning. Standard errors are defined by Pedersen (2017) as:

a subtitle that contains errors, but still has bearing on the actual meaning and does not seriously hamper the viewers’ progress beyond that single subtitle. Standard semantic errors would also be cases where utterances that are important to the plot are left subtitled (p. 219).

As for the serious error, it was defined by Pedersen as:

subtitle that is so erroneous that it makes the viewers’ understanding of the subtitle nil and would hamper the viewers’ progress beyond that subtitle, either by leading to plot misunderstandings or by being so serious as to disturb the contract of illusion for more than just one subtitle (p.219).

As for stylistic errors, Pedersen believes that they are less serious than semantic errors because they do not hamper the understanding of a movie.

The second parameter of the FAR Model is acceptability. Acceptability errors are the errors that make the subtitles sound unnatural. They can be subdivided into three types: grammar errors, spelling errors and errors of idiomaticity. Grammar errors can be rated on the basis of minor, standard and serious errors. Minor errors are

errors that annoy grammarians only such as the use of who instead of whom. Serious errors hamper reading and comprehension while standard errors are in-between. Spelling errors are also classified as serious, standard or minor based on the seriousness of error. If it is just a spelling error, it will be considered a minor error but if it changes the meaning of error, it will be considered as standard errors. Serious errors make it impossible to read a word. Pedersen follows the NER Model in grading acceptability, which means that serious errors are penalized by 1, while Standard errors are penalized by 0.5. Minor errors are penalized by 0.25. Serious errors produce false or misleading information while standard errors are errors that hamper comprehension; they may disrupt the coherent flow of text. Minor errors are errors of capitalization, apostrophes and insertion of small word (Romero-Fresco, 2017).

The third parameter of the FAR Model is readability. Readability errors are divided into errors of segmentation and spotting, punctuation and reading speed and line length. The following graph (Fig. 1) summarizes the FAR Model.

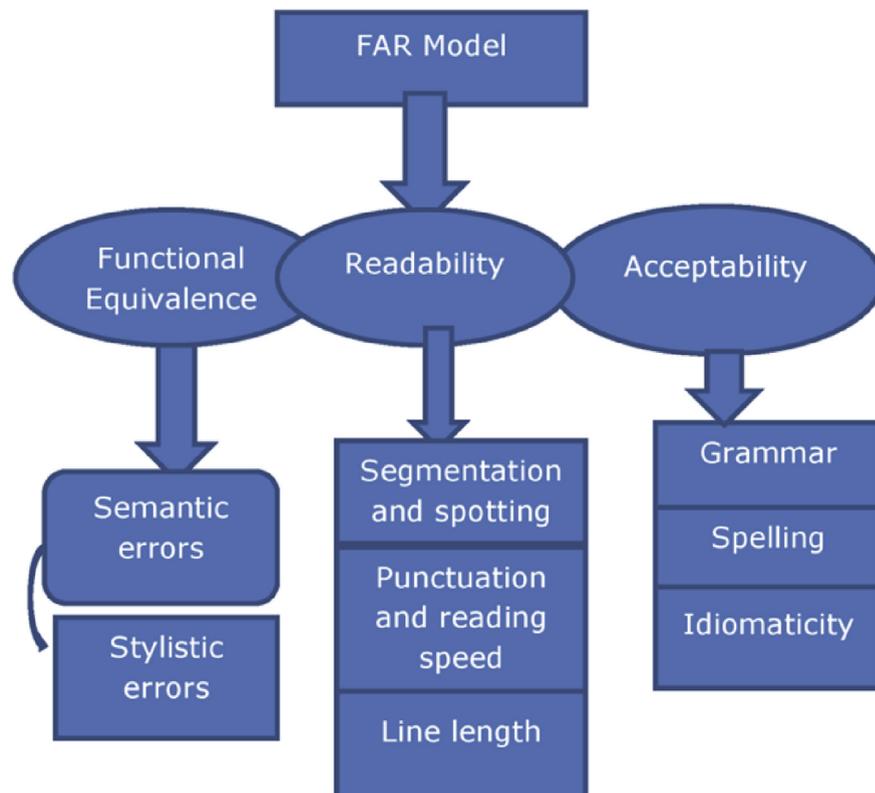


Fig. 1. FAR model.

This research aims to:

1. Identify the strategies adopted in translating cultural references' subtitles
2. Assess the translation quality of the cultural references' subtitles

3. Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature, as verbal texts were examined to identify the translation strategies used and to assess the quality of the translation of cultural references. This study fits in the interpretive paradigm of a qualitative research, which is pertinent with the descriptive translation studies. The data of the study was collected from the American Pie 2 (2001), a movie that was screened in 2001. The movie is intended for adults. It tells the story of a college student and his friends who are after their enjoyment. The friends rejoin after a year of being apart attending different schools. The friends rent a beach house promising to enjoy their time. During the events of the movie, there are a lot of things that have to do with girls and sex. The movie stars Jason Biggs, Seann Williams, Alyson Hannigan and others. This movie was selected in particular because it has many cultural references such as names, sex-related taboos in the Arabic culture, among others. Another reason for choosing the movie is its popularity in the Arab world. The movie was thoroughly analyzed using Pedersen's (2005) typology of subtitling strategies and Pedersen's (2017) tentative quality assessment model. Thirty-two subtitles were selected as examples of the issues examined. For the convenience of presentation, the assessment of the selected subtitles is provided at the end of each subtitling strategy. The English ST is presented first line (s) and the Arabic ST in the second line (s) while the back-translation is presented in the third line (s). The time the ST utterance was said in the movie is also provided for a convenience purpose.

4. Results

In this section, the translation strategies employed in subtitling the movie will be identified and described based on the model proposed by Pedersen (2005, 2011). Then it will be followed by a quality assessment of the translation, which will be based on the quality assessment model of Pedersen (2017).

1. Retention

As explained by Pedersen (2005), this strategy is mostly used in rendering nouns. In the American Pie Movie, this strategy was used in subtitling proper nouns. It sounds to be a kind of exoticism. The names of all the characters and the movie stars were exoticized into Arabic. For example the proper noun of the Movie star, Jim, was translated as جيم. This kind of strategy is similar to transliteration or exoticism. Many examples of such use of a strategy were found in the movie. One example is provided below

1a. 00:01:16,775 -> 00:01:18,653

- Okay, Jim, relax. Relax.

جيم، استرخي. حسنا

Okay, Jim, relax.

In terms of quality assessment, the subtitles that are under retention as a strategy are rarely to have any semantic or stylistic errors because the ST items are just transferred to the subtitles. However, they, in general, might have errors related to acceptability and readability. In the case of the current research no errors were reported throughout the movie in relation to the retention strategy-related subtitles.

2. Translation Using an Euphemistic Expression

Translation by using an expression that is more euphemistic in the TT is one of the subtitling strategies adopted by many subtitlers from English to Arabic. Although this strategy was not mentioned by Pedersen (2005, 2011), it is a common strategy when subtitling to Arabic. In the Arabic culture, people tend not to talk about, watch or listen to sex-related issues so openly. This difference in culture forced the subtitler to render many expressions of sex-related concepts euphemistically to be more acceptable for the target culture viewers, which is a kind of physiological restriction (Malenova, 2015). Examples of this strategy are provided below:

2a. 00:01:18,736-> 00:01:21,863

No strings attached, okay?

It's just friendly goodbye sex

لا داعي لأن نرتبط ببعضنا

هذه مجرد ممارسة للحب نودع بها بعضنا

It's just a practice of love goodbye

2b. 00:01:28,161-> 00:01:31,082

we've never even had friendly hello sex.

أنا لم نمارسه حتى عندما قابلنا بعض

حتى يصبح هذا ممارسة لنودع بعض

We have not practiced it when we first met to call this a goodbye practice

2c. 00:05:59,833-> 00:06:02,713

You don't bother counting how many times you have sex with each other.

فأنت حينها لا تحصى عد المرات التي مارستم فيها الحب سويا

Then, you won't count the times you practiced love together

As seen in the examples above, the expression of “have sex” was subtitled as يمارس الحب (literary (henceforth, lit.) practice or make love). However, sometimes the subtitler opted to omit the sex-related terms in the subtitles (you can find examples under omission strategy). Other examples of the use of euphemism as a translation strategy are presented below.

2d. 00:32:49,406-> 00:32:51,534

He's my **bitch**.

إينه فتاي

He is my boy.

In (2d), the ST word **bitch** was subtitled as فتاي (lit. guy or boy), which is a euphemistic word that conveys the ST meaning without hurting the feelings of the TL viewers.

2e. 00:34:00,777-> 00:34:03,196

who hooked up with who, who slept with who...

مع من نمنا ومن صاحبنا

Who we slept with, who we befriended

In (2e) the ST sex-related expression was subtitled euphemistically to suit the target culture. Another example is provided below where the ST word "boyfriend" was subtitled as صديق (lit.friend), which does not convey the meaning of the ST word but it is justified subtitling.

2f. 00:37:19,369-> 00:37:22,997

I don't see her with a **boyfriend**.

I think that puts me on deck.

أنا لا أراها مع صديق وهذا يضعني على القمة

I don't see her with a friend, and this puts me on top.

In the example provided below, the expression of 'control orgasm' was rendered euphemistically (lit.Trantra teaches you how to control your organs over time) as it sounds culturally shocking to translate the ST expression into Arabic faithful.

2g..00:38:53,514-> 00:38:55,975

Tantra teaches you to **hold**

an orgasm over time...

التانترا تعلم التحكم في

أعضائك بمرور الوقت

Tantra teaches you how to control your organs

Another example of such a use can be found below.

2h. 00:40:39,296-> 00:40:41,0068

Shit. Hello?

اللعة مرحبا؟

Damn it, hello?

As seen in (2h), the word ‘Shit’ was rendered euphemistically as اللعنة (The curse), as the word ‘shit’ is a taboo word in Arabic. See below how the word ‘ass’ was translated

2i. 00:42:16,319-> 00:42:17,779

You ass.

Stifler, get out.

أيها الغبي يا ستيفلر أخرج

You stupid Stifler, get out

As seen in (2i), the word “ass” was translated as الغبي (stupid), which is a neutral word. Some other examples are provided below.

2j. 00:42:24,411-> 00:42:27,999

Shit, dude!

I found a dildo!

اللعنة يا صاح

لقد وجدت قضيبا صناعيا

Damn it, dude, I found an artificial penis.

2k. 00:43:25,395-> 00:43:26,646

Oh, shit, balls!

إنهم بالداخل

اللعنة

Damn it, they are inside

21l. 00:44:17,743-> 00:44:19,620

Shit. She’s de-pantsing.

اللعنة

Damn it.

2m. 00:44:35,887-> 00:44:38,850

Two possible lesbians

in their bras and panties.

فتاتين شاذتين في ملابسهم الداخلية

Two homosexual girls in their underwear

2n. 00:04:15,427-> 00:04:17,806

Got your favourite.

Oh, my God! **They’re fucking!**

لقد أحضرت الكعك المفضل لك

يا إلهي إنهم يمارسوا الحب

I brought your favorite cake. Oh, my god. They are practicing love.

2o. 00:05:34,055-> 00:05:36,892

There’s little hearts on her panties!

Come on, look, you **pussy**. Look.

إنها تضع قلوبا صغيرة على

سروالها الداخلى انظر أيها الغبى

She has little hearts on her pants. Look you stupid

All the examples above show how a subtitler may opt to translate the word euphemistically or by omitting the ST word and compensating for it in the TT. Although some might argue that the subtitles above come under cultural substitution, one of Pedersen's strategies in subtitling, I argue that they are not. Cultural substitution happens when a subtitler attempts to find a functional equivalent for a culture-bound term while in the examples provided above, the subtitler avoided using the cultural equivalent because of cultural reasons. It is not common that people use some expressions in Arabic language, which are tabooed by them. Guided by physiological restrictions, the subtitler decided to avoid such taboos to expand the audience size of the movie. Having discussed the subtitling and how euphemism is employed as a translation strategy, the quality assessment for the samples above is summarized in the table below.

As seen in Table 1, functional equivalence was not a problem in most subtitles. Only in examples 2g and 2l, it was found some standard errors as the meaning of the ST has been changed without hampering the flow of the movie. Some information was left out and some were manipulated in the subtitles. However, this did not affect the plot. In terms of acceptability, most of the subtitles experienced some minor errors because of not conveying idiomaticity in the subtitles.

3. Omission

Omission is one of the strategies employed in subtitling some culture-bound expressions. The subtitler opts to delete the ST expression and he may or may not compensate for it. Sex is one of the taboo areas in the Arabic culture, and therefore subtitlers tend to omit some of them when possible. Consider the following examples that were elicited from the movie.

3.a. 00:07:31,725-> 00:07:34,562

these little **sexual** debacles should not get you down...

يجب ألا تحبطك هذه الإخفاقات البسيطة

These failures should not let you down.

As seen in 3a, the word 'sexual' was omitted in the subtitle. The subtitler may have depended on the context for conveying the intended meaning of the ST expression.

Table 1. Quality assessment for Euphemism-Based Subtitles.

English ST	The subtitle	Subtitling strategy	Functional equivalence	Acceptability	Readability
2a. No strings attached, okay? It's just friendly goodbye sex	لا داعي لأن نرتبط ببعضنا هذه مجرد ممارسة للحب نودع بها بعضنا	Translation Using an Euphemistic Expression	0	0.5	0
2b. we've never even had friendly hello sex .	أنا لم نمارسه حتى عندما قابلنا بعض حتى يصبح هذا ممارسة لنودع بعض	Translation Using an Euphemistic Expression	0.5	0.5	0
2c. You don't bother counting how many times you have sex with each other.	فأنت حينها لا تحصى عدد المرات التي مارستم فيها الحب سويا	Translation Using an Euphemistic Expression	0	0.5	0
2d. He's my bitch .	إنه فتى	Translation Using an Euphemistic Expression	0	0.5	0
2e. who hooked up with who, who slept with who...	مع من نمنا ومن صاحبنا	Translation Using an Euphemistic Expression	0	0.5	0
2f. I don't see her with a boyfriend. I think that puts me on deck.	أنا لا أراها مع صديق وهذا يضعني على القمة	Translation Using an Euphemistic Expression	0.5	0.5	0
2g. Tantra teaches you to hold an orgasm over time...	التانترا تعلم التحكم في أعضائك بمرور الوقت	Translation Using an Euphemistic Expression	1	1	0
2h. Shit. Hello?	اللعة مرحبا؟	Translation Using an Euphemistic Expression	0	0.5	0
2i. You ass. Stiffer, get out.	أيها الغبي يا ستيفلر اخرج	Translation Using an Euphemistic Expression	0	0.5	0
2j. Shit, dude! I found a dildo!	اللعة يا صاح لقد وجدت قضيبا صناعيا	Translation Using an Euphemistic Expression	0	0.5	0
2k. Oh, shit, balls!	إنهم بالداخل اللعة	Translation Using an Euphemistic Expression	0	0.5	0
2l. Shit. She's de-pantsing.	اللعة	Translation Using an Euphemistic Expression	1	1	0
2m. Two possible lesbians in their bras and panties	فتاتين شانتين في ملابسهم الداخلية	Translation Using an Euphemistic Expression	0	0.5	0

Another example is provided below.

3b. 00:34:23,594-> 00:34:26,471

Don't you fuckin' say no.

I know you did.

لا تقل لا أعلم أنك فعلت

Don't say 'I don't know'. You did.

3c. 00:34:42,323-> 00:34:43,783

Fuck yeah, I would.

بل أريد

I would

In (3b), the ST word 'fuckin' was omitted in the subtitles, which doesn't seem to affect the meaning intended. This applies to the example provided below as well.

Consider example (3d) below and how the subtitler omitted the translation of the ST expression "jerk off", maybe due to physiological restrictions as it sounds improper expression in Arabic.

3d. 00:38:50,218-> 00:38:53,430

- Go jerk off.

- Unnecessary.

هذا غير ضروري

This is unnecessary

Another example that shows how a subtitler sometimes diverge from the use of equivalent terms causing confusion to the viewers, which might have been done deliberately to avoid expressions that shock the emotions and feelings of the target culture viewers, can be found below.

3e. 00:38:58,602-> 00:39:01,022

to release it upon the world.

00:39:01,106-> 00:39:03,357

I'm filling up to the brim.

حتى تسيطر على العالم بروحك

So as to control the world

As seen in (3e), the subtitler did not render the ST expressions. Instead, he compensated for such an omission by the addition of another expression, which does not belong to the ST. The ST expression is used in reference to how Tantara helps controlling sexual orgasm that can be reached at its peak and results in filling female vagina with the man's sperm. However, the subtitler, for cultural reasons, opted to delete such expression and replace it by another expression which doesn't help so far in following the flow of the ST dialogue. This can be justified by the physiological restrictions that the subtitler might undergo. Although this strategy might be argued to be a specification strategy, it is not because it did not help clarifying the meaning of the omitted culture-bound term. Thus, I argue that omission can be done followed by a compensation strategy to help compensate for the space left on the screen. In other words, the subtitler may just add some expressions so as not to make the screen with no subtitles during a shot, as this might make viewers lose track of the dialogue or lose enjoyment. Another example of the use of omission as a strategy is provided below.

3f. 00:48:54,942-> 00:48:57,403

My nipples are so hard.

In (3f), the subtitler omitted the ST expression in the subtitles. The ST expression indicated being turned on by sexual touching and feeling. The subtitler opted to omit it maybe because of cultural reasons. Table 2 below summarizes the quality assessment of this part of the research.

Table 2. Quality assessment of the subtitles translated by omission.

English ST	The subtitle	Subtitling strategy	Functional equivalence	Acceptability	Readability
3a. these little sexual debacles should not get you down...	يجب ألا تحبطك هذه الإخفاقات البسيطة	Omission	0	0	0
3b. Don't you fuckin' say no. I know you did.	لا تقل لا أعلم أنك فعلت	Omission	0	0	0
3c. Fuck yeah, I would.	بل أريد	Omission	0	0	0
3d. - Go jerk off. - Unnecessary	هذا غير ضروري	Omission	1	1	0
3e. I'm filling up to the brim.	حتى تسيطر على العالم بروحك	Omission	1	1	0
3f. My nipples are so hard.		Omission	1	1	0

As seen in Table 2, some subtitles showed a standard type of error in terms of functional equivalence (3d, 3e, 3f) and in terms of acceptability. In terms of functional equivalence, the problem lies in semantic errors, as the omission of the ST dialogue affected the message conveyed in the subtitles. In regards to acceptability, the problem is similar to functional equivalence as the omission of the ST expressions made the flow of the dialogue unnatural. The quality of subtitling in this part can be of a medium quality but it is still acceptable as no serious errors were found.

4. Specification

Sometimes even some names of birds and cultural expressions are omitted in the subtitles because they may not be perceived in the TT. However, the subtitler offers explication of the ST expression to make it accessible by the TL viewers. So, in this case, the subtitler does not only omit the ST expression in the subtitles but he also compensates for such an omission. This is what Pedersen called “specification”. One example of this strategy use is provided below:

4a. 00:33:09,971-> 00:33:13,058

It's like a hummingbird feeder.

الأمر كرحلة تدريبية على الحب

It is like a love training (learning) journey

As seen in (4a), the ST expression was omitted in the subtitles; however, another expression was added in the subtitles to keep the flow of the dialogue and so as not to create mental space for the viewers, as they might get distracted if the screen is left without subtitles. Another example of specification strategy use is provided below.

4b. 00:45:54,828-> 00:45:58,041

- What the hell was that?

- I don't know. Call 9 11.

ماذا كان هذا؟

لا أعلم اطلبى الطوارئ 911

What was that? I don't know call the emergency number 911

As seen in (4b), the ST number 911 was subtitled as الطوارئ 911 to explicate the meaning by adding the word الطوارئ. Table 3 provides a summary of the quality assessment of the aforementioned examples.

Table 3. Quality assessment of specification strategy-adopted subtitles.

English ST	The subtitle	Subtitling strategy	Functional equivalence	Acceptability	Readability
4a. It's like a hummingbird feeder	الأمر كرحلة تدريبية على الحب	Specification	0	0.5	0
4b. What the hell was that? - I don't know. Call 9 11.	ماذا كان هذا؟ لا أعلم اطلبى الطوارئ 911	Specification	0	0	0

As seen in Table 3, example 4a only showed a minor acceptability error because of not rendering the idiomatic expression in the ST.

5. Rendering Informal language formal

One strategy that was identified by the researcher is rendering informal language formally. Some cultural references were subtitled formally to make them accessible and understandable by everyone in the Arab world. Examples of this strategy use can be found below.

5a. 00:33:18,439-> 00:33:20,775

Fellas, nice pad.

يا رفاقيا

Fellows

As seen in (1), ‘fellas’ was subtitled as رفاق, which is a more formal cultural equivalent in the Arabic language. Another example is subtitled the informal word ‘guy’ as رفاق (see below).

5b. 00:02:02,198-> 00:02:04,910

I mean, girls like a guy with confidence.

أعنيان الفتيات تحب الفتى الواثق من نفسه

I mean that girls like a young man with confidence

Another example that indicates how the word ‘is rendered differently can be found below in (5c).

5c. 00:03:42,684-> 00:03:45,312

- Where's my big guy?

أين ولدي الكبير؟

Where is my older son?

The ST word ‘guy’ in (5c) was rendered formally as ولدي. This was adopted by the subtitler to heighten comprehension. The same word ‘guy’ was subtitled formally as الشاب, as in (5d). So, the ST word was rendered differently in different situations but all the subtitles share the fact that they were rendered formally.

5d. 00:10:23,812-> 00:10:26,396

You're that guy who blew his load on the Internet.

أنت ذلك الشاب الذي أفرغ حمولته على الإنترنت

You are that young man who blew his load on the Internet

Another example of such a strategy use can be found below in 5e.

5e. 00:35:01,177-> 00:35:05,305

Jim, can't you leave your shirt on?

You're scaring the **chicks** away.

لم لا ترتدى قميصك يا جيم؟

أنت تخيف النساء هكذا

Why do you not wear your shirt? You are scaring women this way?

In (5e), the slang word 'chicks' was subtitled formally and neutrally as النساء (women). A quality assessment of the above-explained subtitles is summarized in Table 4 below.

As showed in Table 4, no serious or standard errors were found. Only some standard errors were found in the component of acceptability, which are mostly due to the slight change in the register use of the ST in the subtitles.

6. Generalization

This strategy is used to subtitle some culture bound terms. Some examples of such a strategy use are provided below.

6a. 00:38:36,579-> 00:38:38,390

Lesbians live here.

شواذ يعيشون هنا

Eccentrics live here

As seen in (6a), the word 'Lesbians' was subtitled as شواذ, which is a more polite euphemistic word than some other Arabic equivalents of the ST word (e.g. سحاق). This is a kind of mixed strategy of using generalization and of using a euphemistic expression. Generalization in the sense that the TT word is more general and can refer to gays and lesbians, and at the same time it is more euphemistic. This is similar to the example provided below. It seems that subtitlers sometimes employ more than one strategy in subtitling some cultural references.

6b. 00:38:41,082-> 00:38:45,254

that it is possible for women
to hold hands and not be **gay**.

من المستحيل ان تمسك النساء ايدي

بعضهم ولا يكونوا شواذ

that it is possible for women to hold hands and not be eccentric

Table 4. Quality assessment of informal subtitles rendered formally.

English ST	The subtitle	Subtitling strategy	Functional equivalence	Acceptability	Readability
5a. Fellas, nice pad.	يا رفاق	Rendering Informal language formal	0	0.5	0
5b. I mean, girls like a guy with confidence.	أعنيان الفتيات تحب الفتى الواثق من نفسه	Rendering Informal language formal	0	0.5	0
5c. Where's my big guy?	أينولى الكبير؟	Rendering Informal language formal			0
5d. You're that guy who blew his load on the Internet.	أنت ذلك الشاب الذى أفرغ حمولته على الإنترنت	Rendering Informal language formal			0
5e. Jim, can't you leave your shirt on? You're scaring the chicks away.	لم لا ترندى قميصك يا جيم؟ أنت تخيف النساء هكذا	Rendering Informal language formal	0	0.5	0

Another example of the use of generalization is provided below:

6c. 00:39:26,716→ 00:39:29,136

going with Pierre
to the **Parc Guell**

وأذهب مع بيير إلى المنتزه

I will go with Pierre to the park

In (6c) above, the ST name of park was omitted and replaced by a more general term, viz., المنتزه (The park), to clarify the meaning of the ST word as the viewers may not know the Parc Guell. A quality assessment of the subtitles explained in this section is summarized in the table below.

Table 5 above shows no record of any type of errors because generalization always aims to expand and explicate the meaning intended in the original work.

7. Direct translation

Some cultural references were rendered directly and literally in the movie. One example is provided below.

7a. 00:40:50,182→ 00:40:53,395

All right, look, man. I got
my hand on my dick right now, okay...

يا رجل إن يدي على قضيبى الآن

Man, my hand is on my penis now.

As seen in 1, the TS word ‘dick’ was rendered literally though it is a taboo word in Arabic but it might have been the only option for the subtitler. Further, the TT word قضيبى is a neutral word that is used formally. So the subtitler used a formal word to subtitle the informal word to reduce its taboo effect on the Arab viewers. The

Table 5. Quality assessment of subtitles translated using generalization strategy.

English ST	The subtitle	Subtitling strategy	Functional equivalence	Acceptability	Readability
6a. Lesbians live here.	شواذ يعيشون هنا	Generalization	0	0	0
6b. that it is possible for women to hold hands and not be gay.	من المستحيل ان تمسك النساء ايدي بعضهم ولا يكونوا شواذ	Generalization	0	0	0
6c. going with Pierre to the Parc Guell	وأذهب مع بيير إلى المنتزه	Generalization	0	0	0

subtitled employed two strategies concurrently, that is, rendering an informal word as formal and employing direct translation. Another example can be seen below.

7b. You're that guy who blew his load on the Internet.

أنت ذلك الشاب الذي أفرغ حملته على الإنترنت

You are that young man who blew his load on the Internet.

In 7b, the subtitled rendered the idiom literally. The idiom refers to the fact that the movie star Jim ejaculated online when he was with a girl. However, the subtitled opted to render it literally to avoid the unacceptability of the expression in the Arabic culture. One more example of the use of direct translation is provided below.

7c. 00:05:41,064-> 00:05:43,985

Here it is, the end of our freshman year

and you **screwed one girl**.

إنها نهاية عامنا الأول وأنت

لم تعبت سوى مع فتاة واحدة

Here is the end of our first year, and you have fooled around with only one girl

Another example is provided below in 7d where the idiom was translated literally.

7d. 00:06:06,509-> 00:06:08,928

I'll get you a spoon

so you can eat my ass.

سأحضر لك ملعقة ولتأكل بها مؤخرتي

I will get you a spoon to eat my ass.

Table 6. Quality assessment of the subtitles rendered using direct translation strategy.

English ST	The subtitle	Subtitling strategy	Functional equivalence	Acceptability	Readability
7a. All right, look, man. I got my hand on my dick right now, okay...	يا رجل إن يدي على قضيبى الآن	Direct translation	0	0	0
7b. You're that guy who blew his load on the Internet	أنت ذلك الشاب الذى أفرغ حملته على الإنترنت	Direct translation	0	1	0
7c. Here it is, the end of our freshman year and you screwed one girl .	إنها نهاية عامنا الأول وأنت لم تعبت سوى مع فتاة واحدة	Direct translation	0.5	1	0
7d I'll get you a spoon so you can eat my ass.	سأحضر لك ملعقة ولتأكل بها مؤخرتي	Direct translation	0	1	0

As seen in 7d, the ST expression is used to mock somebody or disgrace what he says. It is an English expression that was rendered literally in the subtitles. A quality assessment of the subtitles rendered using direct translation strategy is provided below.

Table 6 above shows some cases where standard errors occurred because of not translating the ST idiom functionally, which affected the conveyance of meaning but it did not disrupt the plot of the movie.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed at identifying the subtitling strategies adopted in subtitling the American movie entitled *American Pie*, and which was released in 2001, and to assess the quality of the translation of culture-bound terms. For this purpose, the data was collected from the movie and qualitatively analyzed using Pedersen's (2005, 2011) typology of subtitling strategies and Pedersen's (2017) quality assessment mode. The results of the study showed that all the strategies proposed by Pedersen were used with the exception of Substitution. It was also found that some other translation strategies were used in the subtitles. Two subtitling strategies were identified by the author: using euphemistic expressions and using formal language to render informal language. Using euphemistic expressions to render some taboo words in the Arabic culture was used to avoid the problem of the cultural gap between English and Arabic, and to make the movie accessible to a larger audience. In addition, some physiological restrictions played a role in selecting translation strategies, as the commissioner or censorship authorities may not allow some words and expressions to be displayed on the screen. Moreover, the subtitler's beliefs might force him to choose a specific subtitling strategy. In short, it can be noticed that the use of euphemistic expressions to subtitle some Arabic-tabooed expressions may have not hampered the comprehension of the movie but it made the TT sound unnatural and the flavor of fun and frivolity that is pertinent in the ST was lost in the subtitles. The translator is found to be in a perplexing situation, viz., whether to sacrifice naturalness and faithfulness (which exceptionally don't contradict) to reach larger audience or sacrifice the large audience for naturalness and faithfulness. However, there might be a kind of compromise, as there should be two versions of subtitles: one that is displayed in the cinema and the other on the TV. As for subtitling the informal language formally, this might be to avoid misunderstandings or comprehension problems. Arabs speak different dialects and therefore using a formal language reduces the chances of miscomprehension. One more reason behind the use of formal language is the fact that some Arabic informal equivalents of the English expressions sound to be tabooed in the Arabic culture. This strategy seems also to be related to the audience factor which makes it difficult to meet the expectations of all audiences. Similar to the suggestion mentioned earlier, the solution can be through

providing different versions of subtitles based on the dialect of a specific audience. This, however, raises the issue of the cost of subtitling. The quality assessment showed that most subtitles are of a good quality, as in few cases there were some serious errors or problems. Further studies on subtitling are still lacking, especially studies that address the subtitler's ideology and its impact on subtitles.

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Author contribution statement

Noureldin Abdelaal: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

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