

Manipulating Swearwords and Sexual References in Arabic Subtitles of American Fiction

Dr. Abdelouahab ELBAKRI

University of Ibn Zohr, Agadir, Morocco

Abstract: This article aims at discussing the manipulation of taboo words in Arabic subtitles of American fiction. It sets out to investigate the translation strategies translators use in subtitling immoral expressions and analyze the solutions subtitlers opt for. It focuses on two fields of study: swearwords and sexual references. The study is based on the work of Díaz Cintas (2004), (2007) and (2012) on ideological manipulation in Audiovisual Translation (AVT). The theory stipulates that translators have turned into intercultural agents and mediators shaping the ideological discourse of their culture.

Keywords: AVT, subtitling, manipulation, taboo, swearwords, sexual reference

1. Introduction

In spite of the global nature of the world today, to which media and entertainment industry has largely contributed, the gap between American and Middle Eastern cultures is extraordinarily huge. The Arab World is still heavily dominated by theocracy which allows religious teachings to monitor the individual's life within the community and his/her relationship and interaction with the 'other'. On the other hand, the US is governed by a liberal moral philosophy which promotes the freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion and the separation of church and state.

The media and entertainment industry in America embrace modern liberalism which seeks to spread and maintain some civil rights like, gay rights, same - sex marriage, abortion, etc. These issues are not unanimous even in the US as they are firmly opposed by conservative Americans whose life is still controlled by religion. Entertainment productions, especially movies and series, are a good representation of this modern liberalism. Most fictions today include, at least, one of the issues modern liberalism crusades for.

American fictions reflect both philosophies, and as such they represent a big threat to Middle Eastern culture. In this case, societies, such as the Arab world, have to develop their defensive stances and attempt to protect the public from exposure to foreign influence, namely modern Liberalism, and block the penetration of such foreign cultures which are undoubtedly inappropriate (Hermans 2013). The front liner shield in this 'battle' against cultural invasion is the translator. It is a responsibility they undertake and which emanates from three factors: their personal cultural background as professional, the authority of patronage and the reference to Arab - Islamic poetics.

This article investigates the translation strategies translators use in subtitling taboo words and expressions, namely swearwords and sexual references.

Subtitling as the main AVT mode in the Arab world

AVT is as old as cinema itself in the Arab world. The first silent movie was released in 1927. Half a decade later, Titra

film productions launched its first talkie and subtitled film entitled *Children of the Rich*. Egypt also took part in the Venice film festival in 1936. Gamal (2008: 2) states that "by the time American talkies started to arrive in Egypt in the early thirties, the country already had a strong dramatic arts base... Naturally, foreign films had to be subtitled into Arabic." At the time, the technique of dubbing was refined enough to be used adequately and convincingly. Yet, Maluf (2005) argues that subtitling was favored over dubbing for three reasons:

- 1) The variety of Arabic dialects and the obstinate tendencies of Arabic speakers to listen to standard Arabic;
- 2) The politico - ideological attempts made to discourage Arab television channels from diffusing non - traditional values, or questioning well - established social and political structures;
- 3) The significant difference between the costs of subtitling and dubbing. Maluf (2005) puts the former at around 10% to 15% of the costs of dubbing but, in fact, the latter can be up to 40 times greater than those of subtitling.

We are especially interested in the second factor provided by Maluf. Because in addition to the fact that subtitling is far less expensive than dubbing, the ideological factor is extremely decisive in determining the AVT mode. Most of the content that violates the norms and values of the Arab culture is simply omitted in subtitles taking advantage of the technical constraint which allows the omission of about 35% of the audio script. Yet, omission is not always the solution. Arabic subtitlers also resort to other manipulative techniques to protect the target audience.

Díaz Cintas and Remael's strategies of culture bound terms

Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007) provide a detailed set of strategies based on Díaz Cintas (2003) and Santamaria Guinot (2001). These strategies are the ones we shall adopt in this study to help us analyze how culture bound words are ideologically manipulated, given that taboo words are a good representation of this category of words. Ranzato (2013: 101) argues that Díaz Cintas and Remael's strategies have "the merit of being both detailed and agile enough to serve as a valid tool for analysis, due to the absence of

encumbering subdivisions and to the presence of well - defined clarifications. ” These strategies are comprehensive as they include a broader scope of contexts and cases. Here they are:

- 1) Loan: the word or phrase of the ST is borrowed by the TT and left unaltered, for example: food (muffin), drinks (cognac), places (San Francisco), historical events (perestroika) ...
- 2) Calque: it is a literal translation of a CB terms, especially when an exact equivalent in the TL is not available, for example: the Spanish title *Secretario de Estado* is a calque translation of Secretary of State, while *Ministro de Asuntos Exteriores* (Minister of Foreign Affairs)] would be more appropriate.
- 3) Explication: the translator tries to make the text more accessible by meeting the target audience half way, either through specification by using a hyponym (tulip for flower) or through generalization by using a hypernym (Belgian quality paper for Le Soir)
- 4) Substitution: a term is substituted with another one which is deviated from the source one because of technical constraints. A long reference that could be translated literally may be substituted by a shorter one to gain space and save reading time (stew for Goulash).
- 5) Transposition: the cultural concept is replaced by another cultural concept belonging to another culture (the Dutch HEMA for The British Marks & Spencer).
- 6) Lexical recreation: it is the creation of a neologism, which may be inevitable if in the ST there is a made - up word as well. (the Spanish neologism *rarezametro* [oddity - meter] for the English ‘weird shit - o - meter’)
- 7) Compensation: it is compensating a loss somewhere in the translation of an exchange by over - translating or adding something in another. It is “popular strategy in subtitling even though it may not always be practical due to the oral - visual cohabitation of the source and target languages” (Diaz Cintas and Remael 2007: 206).
- 8) Omission: though it is not an appropriate strategy, but it is sometimes unavoidable either because of space - time constraints or because there is no corresponding term in the TL.
- 9) Addition: it occurs when CBT might cause comprehension problems. (candidat Palantine for Palantine).

To sum up, for our analysis of the ideological manipulation of CB items in subtitling, we shall use the taxonomy and the strategies Diaz Cintas and Remael (2007) have elaborated. I strongly believe both elements are the most suitable for my analysis of Arabic subtitles of English speaking movies and series.

Manipulating swearwords in subtitling

Swearwords refer to terms that are considered offensive, abusive or insulting in a particular culture. They are “often described as unpleasant or ugly - sounding” (Allan and Burridge, 2006). They have been given different designations: ‘dirty language’ (Jay 1980), ‘strong language’ (Lung 1998; Scandura 2004), ‘bad language’ (Azzaro 2005; McEnery 2006), ‘foul language’ (Azzaro 2005; Wajnryb 2005), ‘rude language’ (Hughes 2006), ‘taboo language’ (Allan and Burridge 2006; Jay 2009), ‘emotionally charged

language’ (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007) and ‘offensive language’ (Hughes 2006; Díaz Cintas 2012; Filmer 2013), (cited in José Javier Ávila - Cabrera 2015).

Pujol (2006) claims that swearwords are used to express different feelings: extreme anger, emphasis, disgust, contempt, surprise, and happiness. However, there are some social benefits in using them. It is argued that when bad language is used appropriately, it can make social bounds tighter and create harmonious cozy environments (Dewaele 2006; Jay 2009; Robin - Eliece 1995; Vingerhoets et al.2013). It can also show how free a person feels within a group and how intimate they are (Jay et al.2008; Pinker 2007; Vingerhoets et al.2013; Winterset al.2001). It is also used to express belonging and membership (Jay et al.2008; Pinker 2007; Hansen 2016).

In relation to subtitling, Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 195) claim that “Taboo words, swearwords and interjections are often toned down in subtitles or even deleted if space is limited. ” However, deletion can sometimes be a bad solution as these words may “fulfill functions in the dialogic interaction and, by extension, in the film story” (196). Taboo words meet a phatic or exclamatory objective and the translator has to recognize their emotional value for the source viewer, and then try to transmit the same effect and value to the target viewer. In some cases, the use of these words helps to identify the traits of characters and their feelings. Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 197) posit that “The translation of taboo words and swearwords is crucial when they contribute to characterization or when they fulfill a thematic function in a film.”

Unfortunately, in the case of Arabic subtitles, subtitlers have to ignore the importance of taboo words in a given scene. They cannot devote much consideration either to identifying the taboo words phatic function and emotional impact on the viewer or to its importance in depicting the features and feelings of the character that uses them. They mostly opt for deletion or choose alternatives that deprive these words from any function. They have to do so because they cannot do otherwise considering the heavy moral constraints that enchain their performances.

Swearwords in the Arabic subtitles of the movie *Zero Dark thirty*¹

In this context, we will study the subtitling of swearwords in the movie *Zero Dark thirty* on the basis of Diaz Cintas and Remael’s (manipulative) techniques: deletion and toning down. In this movie, swearwords are used more than sixty times to express different states of mind, including anger, emphasis, disgust, contempt, surprise, and happiness or to

¹ *Zero Dark Thirty* is a 2012 American thriller film directed by Kathryn Bigelow and written by Mark Boal. The film dramatizes the nearly decade-long international manhunt for Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden after the September 11 attacks. This search leads to the discovery of his compound in Pakistan and the military raid that resulted in bin Laden’s death on May 2, 2011. (quoted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zero_Dark_Thirty)

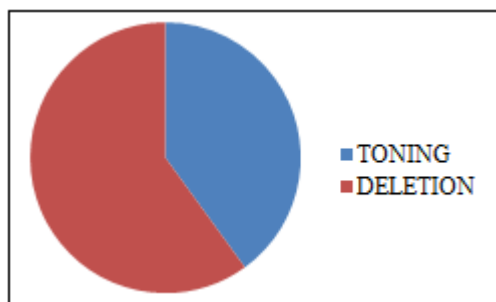
fulfill different speech acts including threatening, greeting, swearwords and their subtitles as well as a classification of introducing, etc. We will first draw a list of these the techniques used in translating them.

Translation		Technique	
Original soundtrack	Subtitles	Deletion	Toning - down
Now, I just gotta get his ass down here.	أريد فقط أن أجلبه إلى هنا	√	
Senators jumping over our asses	أعضاء مجلس الشيوخ يراقبون تحركاتنا		Explicitation
Her confidence that's keeping me from getting ass - raped in some Pakistani prison.	ثقتها هو الأمر الوحيد الذي يحميني من التحرش في سجن باكستاني		Explicitation
He's being a dick	انه وقح		Substitution
Fuck you!	تبأ لك		Explicitation
What the fuck do you think is going on, Ammar?	ماذا بحقك تظن انه يحدث يا عمار	√	
What the fuck is that supposed to mean?	ما الذي يعنيه ذلك	√	
if he doesn't fuck up, he could be called in to treat bin Laden.	إذا لم يكشف فسنادي عليه لعلاج المتهم		√
And what the fuck have we done about it, huh?	و ما الذي فعلناه حيال ذلك	√	
Fuck me dead.	لا أصدق		Explicitation
Fuck.	تبأ		Explicitation
The political move here is to tell you to go fuck yourself,	الحركة السياسية هنا تقول لك أن تذهب إلى الجحيم		Explicitation
Well, this is a little bit of a cluster fuck, isn't it?	الأمر معقد قليلا	√	
It's a lucky shot.	انها ضربة حظ	√	
Fuck.	إنها بحالة سيئة		Explicitation
- - It's kinda fucked up.	لابد أن أوضاعكم أصبحت سيئة بعد 11 سبتمبر		Substitution
It must be pretty fucked up for you guys after 9/11.	ابو غريب و غوانتانامو دمرا سمعنا		Explicitation
Abu Ghraib and Gitmo fucked us.	المخابرات الباكستانية وشت بك		Explicitation
ISI fucked you.	لو كان يقود سيارة عادية أو صغيرة فكان أمرنا لينتهي		Explicitation
If he was driving a sedan or a compact, we'd be fucked.	اضطر المسكين لنهوض من النوم	√	
Poor fucker had to get out of bed.	هل كنت تعتقد حقا لما امسكتا بك انني سأكون رجلا جيدا	√	
Did you really think. . . that when we got you, 'I would get a nice fucking guy'?	بحقك يا رجل انا أعبت معك		Substitution
Come on, man, I'm fucking with you.	لقد كان مزعجا جدا	√	
but. . . he's tier - fucking - one, baby.	لأنها لن تجيبكم	√	
'cause she's not gonna fucking tell you.	هذا غير معقول	√	
Un - fucking believable.	أقول خالد الشيخ	√	
I say, 'Fucking KSM'	ربما هو رجل خرافي	√	
Perhaps this 'Abu' is actually a cover story and he's really a fucking unicorn.	ربما فاقوا المائة بحلول هذا الوقت	√	
It's gotta be over a fucking hundred at this point.	انا نذير شوم	√	
I'm bad fucking news	هل تصدق ذلك	√	
you fucking believe that?	انجزوا اعمالكم	√	
Do your fucking jobs	أسفة تأخرت عند نقط التفتيش	√	
Sorry. Fucking checkpoints.	أجل أريد لهذا الكلام أن يكون صحيحا	√	
Yes, I fucking want it to be true!	اجلب لي رقم هاتف آل سعيد	√	
And bring me this fucking Sayeed family's phone number.	انا لا اكرث بالمتهم	√	
I don't fucking care about bin Laden	انه شخص مستقل يعمل على الإنترنت	√	
This guy's a freelancer working off the fucking internet.	قد يكون ميتا	√	
He might as well be fucking dead.	أنت تطارد شبكا بينما تنمو الشبكة العنينة بأكملها من حوله.	√	
You're chasing a ghost while the whole fucking network grows all around you.	أنت مجنونة	√	
You're fucking out of your mind.	من دون هراء		Substitution
no fucking bullshit	هل هو هناك أم ليس هناك؟	√	
Is he there or is he not fucking there?	أجل أو لا؟	√	
A fucking 'yes' or a 'no'.	أعتقد أنها ذكية	√	
I think she's fucking smart.	اسكت هذا الطفل ، من فضلك.	√	
Shut that fucking kid up, please.	لا توجد طريقة تمكننا تفجير هذا الشيء.	√	
No fucking way we can blow this thing.	تبأ		Substitution
God - fucking - damnit	أوه ، لقد قتلت أبرار	√	
Oh, I fucking smoked Abrar	يا لها من فوضى عارمة.	√	
What a fucking mess.			

Whoa, fucking shit.	تبا	√	Substitution
Every fucking hard drive!	كل قرص صلب!	√	
I'm the motherfucker that found this place, sir.	أنا البائسة التي وجدت هذا المكان		Substitution
Motherfucker. Good.	البائسة! جيد		Substitution
And I know this dude is up to some serious shit.	أعلم أن هذا الرجل قائم على عمل كبير		Explicitation
Dude, you shit your pants?	قضيت حاجتك في بنطالك		Substitution
he may be full of shit.	ربما يكون احمق		Explicitation
Roger that, possible jackpot.- Shit.	روجر أن هذا ، فوز بالجائزة الكبرى. تبا		Substitution

Classification of the techniques in subtitling swearwords

Considering the application of the two strategies used for subtitling swearwords in this movie, we notice that deletion is used 36 times while toning down 24 times.



As we have mentioned earlier, deletion is the most recurrent technique because of three main reasons:

- It is easier for the subtitler.
- The specificity of AVT and its constrained nature allow the subtitler a certain degree of flexibility to choose what to translate and what to drop since, as mentioned in chapter three, only some 65% of the soundtrack is translated while some 35% is deleted.
- Toning down needs a thoroughly careful study of the implications of the swearword which depends on the translator's deep knowledge of the source culture.

The subtitler mostly opts for deletion in one of two cases. First, when the swearword is used as an adverb intensifying the following adjective or verb as in

He might as well be **fucking** dead قد يكون ميتا

'Fucking' plays the role of an adverb modifying the adjective 'dead'. So, the subtitle turns into a short sentence in which the adverb is omitted. It is also easily deleted when it modifies a verb as in:

I don't **fucking** care about bin Laden انا لا أكره بالمتهم It comes also as an adjective modifying a noun as in

Do your **fucking** jobs انجزوا اعمالكم It is used in this sequence as an adjective preceding the noun 'jobs'. The swearword is also deleted when it comes as an interjection used to express anger, disgust, contempt, surprise, or happiness as in:

It's a lucky shot. **Fuck!** انها ضربة حظ The swearword/interjection is deleted though it reflects the speaker's surprise to the achievement of his interlocutor.

Toning down the swearword is the second option adopted by the subtitler. In this case, the translator uses euphemism to alleviate the swearword's effect on the audience. This

euphemism is achieved via two strategies: substitution and explicitation.

Here are some examples:

Maya tells the CIA Director:

I'm the motherfucker that found this place, sir. أنا البائسة التي وجدت هذا المكان Maya employs the offensive word 'motherfucker' to show her boss how desperate and determined she is. And even the reaction of her boss joins this interpretation as he shows pleasure in hearing her words. The euphemistic use of البائسة converts Maya's feeling of despair but loses her determination. Another use of euphemism is expressed in examples like:

'Whoa, fucking shit.' / 'Fuck.' / 'God - fucking - damnit'/ Shit تبا these offensive expressions among others are subtitled by words such as تبا which is a softened old almost meaningless swearword that cannot offend in any case the conservative Arab audience. Sometimes, the translation of the swearword reflects a positive meaning:

Come on, man, I'm fucking with you. بحقك يا رجل انا أعبث the difference between the two words is quite obvious. The Arabic word عبث implies kidding/ joking more than any negative meaning.

To conclude, swearwords are subject to heavy manipulation. They are either deleted completely or toned down to fit in the Middle Eastern context. As opposed to other types, this type of manipulation is noticed by the audience and generally appreciated. Moreover, the linguistic channel used in subtitles, namely modern standard Arabic (MSA), is basically a language of media and science. This standard variety of Arabic, is different from the standard varieties of other languages since it does not have any native speaker and lacks subsequently the socio - communicative tokens any standard language has.

Manipulating sexual references in Arabic subtitles

In this context, we shall study some scenes which evolve around topics related to sex. Sometimes the reference to sexual content is explicit, but some other times it is implicit. We will see how Arabic subtitlers deal with each one of the two cases. Let's consider first how they proceed when the sexual reference is manifest. The scene that we will study is taken from *Austin powers*²

² *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* is a 1997 American spy comedy film directed by Jay Roach. It stars Mike Myers, as Austin Powers and Dr. Evil. The film, which cost US\$16.5 million, opened on May 2, 1997, grossing US\$53 million from its North

American release and over \$67 million worldwide. (quoted from
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austin_Powers)

Volume 10 Issue 8, August 2021

www.ijsr.net

[Licensed Under Creative Commons Attribution CC BY](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

<p>Situation: Vanessa asks Austin about his relationship with Allota</p> <p>Vanessa: Listen, I know I'm just being neurotic, but I can't shake this suspicious</p> <p>Austin: Don't be sorry. You're right to be suspicious. I shagged her. I shagged her rotten.</p> <p>Vanessa: I can't believe you made love to her just like that. <i>Did you use protection?</i></p> <p>Austin: <i>Of course, I had my nine - millimeter automatic.</i></p> <p>Vanessa: <i>No, did you use a condom?</i></p> <p>Austin: <i>Only sailors use condoms, man.</i></p> <p>Vanessa: <i>Not in the Nineties.</i></p> <p>Austin: <i>Well they should, filthy beggars, they go from port to port. Alotta meant nothing to me.</i></p> <p>Vanessa: Well, it means something to me. If you want us to have a relationship, you've got to be a one - woman man. You can't just go and shag anybody</p> <p>Austin: It was just a shag, Vanessa. You're everything to me.</p> <p>Vanessa: You just don't get it, do you, Austin? Good night. Welcome to the Nineties, you're going to be very lonely.</p>
<p>فانيسا: اسمع ، أعلم أنني أشعر بالتوتر فقط ، لكن لا يمكنني التخلص من هذا الشك أوستن: لا تتأسف. أنت محق في الشك. قضيت معها وقتاً حميمياً. لقد فعلت ذلك حقاً فانيسا: لا أصدق أنك مارست الحب معها تماماً مثل هذا. ألوتا لا تعني شيئاً بالنسبة لي. فانيسا: حسناً ، هذا يعني شيئاً بالنسبة لي. إذا كنت تريد أن تكون لنا علاقة ، يجب أن تكون رجلاً لامرأة واحدة. لا يمكنك أن تعاشر أية فتاة عندما نشاء أوستن: لقد كانت مجرد علاقة عابرة ، فانيسا. أنت كل شيء بالنسبة لي. فانيسا: أنت فقط لا تفهم ، أليس كذلك ، أوستن؟ تصبح على خير. مرحباً بك في التسعينيات ، ستكون وحيداً جداً.</p>
<p>Vanessa: Listen, I know I'm just feeling nervous, but I can't get rid of this suspicion</p> <p>Austin: Don't be sorry. You're right to be suspicious. I spent an intimate time with her. I really did</p> <p>Vanessa: I can't believe you made love to her just like that.</p> <p>Austin: Alotta meant nothing to me.</p> <p>Vanessa: Well, it means something to me. If you want us to have a relationship, you've got to be a one - woman man. You can't just go and keep company with anybody</p> <p>Austin: It was just relationship, Vanessa. You're everything to me.</p> <p>Vanessa: You just don't get it, do you, Austin? Good night. Welcome to the Nineties, you're going to be very lonely.</p>

In this scene, Austin admits that he had a sexual relationship with Allota. Vanessa is shocked and scorns him for that. Being British, Austin uses the word 'shag'. According to the Online Cambridge dictionary, verb [I or T] uk /ʃæg/ us /ʃæɡ/, shag verb [I or T] (SEX), UK offensive, to have sex with someone.

Noun uk /ʃæg/ us /ʃæɡ/, shag noun (SEX), [C] UK offensive, an act of having sex, or a sexual partner

The subtitler uses three different words and expressions to translate that the word 'shag'. As a verb, it is translated by the expression قضيت معها وقتاً حميمياً and by the verb تعاشر. The first expression is very euphemistic. It means 'to spend intimate time with'. It does not necessarily imply that there is sexual intercourse. It may just refer to 'cuddling' or anything alike. The verb too in the second translation sounds inoffensive. It means to 'associate closely with', 'get along with', or 'keep company with'. It is used to describe the company husband and wife keep to each other which among other things include sex. As a noun, the expression علاقة is almost meaningless since the term علاقة/ relationship is a general word that refers to sex only when it associated to an adjective: sexual relationship علاقة جنسية

Euphemism as a manipulative strategy is very common in Arabic subtitles. This euphemism is strengthened by the nature of MSA as it does not allow a great deal of offensiveness. Alkhoury (2011) posits that by making offensive language sublime in literary Arabic terms, the translator makes them more civilized because, in the Arab collective unconscious, dialects, the low languages, are full of vulgarities and are therefore associated with them, while MSA, the high language, is characterized by a certain prestige with which it is always associated. (translation is mine)

In other words, Arabic subtitlers are not in short of expressions to circumvent the offensiveness of the English 'immoral' sexual words, simply because even if they want to use an identical effect of vulgarity in MSA subtitles, they cannot. They do not exist. MSA's different jargons do not include words or expressions that may hurt the feeling of the audience as colloquial language does. If it is not the case, what could be the MSA offensive counterpart of the English offensive 'shag'?

Another manipulative strategy is omission. If we compare the English exchange to the Arabic subtitles, we notice that a part is omitted. The missing part is about the 'condom'. The use of this word would give the vague expressions قضيت معها وقتاً حميمياً and علاقة عابرة the context the Arabic subtitles have taken away from them. Moreover, the 'condom' as a newly used word cannot be manipulated by any euphemism provided by MSA.

Sometimes sexual references are not that explicit as in the above scene. They are rather culture bound. We shall provide some examples of the manipulative techniques subtitlers employ in such situations. These sequences are taken from the series *Grey's Anatomy*³:

³ *Grey's Anatomy* is an American medical drama television series that premiered on March 27, 2005, on the American Broadcasting Company (ABC). The fictional series focuses on the lives of surgical interns, residents, and attendings as they develop into seasoned doctors while balancing personal and professional relationships. The title is an allusion to *Gray's Anatomy*, a classic human anatomy textbook first published in 1858 in London and written by Henry Gray. (quoted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grey%27s_Anatomy)

Situation: Surgeon Burke is removing an object from the throat of a raped girl
Dr. Burke: what is this? Does anybody know what this is? Grey: Oh my God!
Dr Burke: What spit out Grey?
Grey: She bit it off
Dr. Burke: Bit off what?
Grey: That's his ...penis! She bit off his penis
ما هذا؟ أيعرف أحدكم ما هو هذا؟ بيرك دكتور يا إلهي: غراي! ماذا تحدثي غراي؟ بيرك دكتور لقد قضمته: غراي قضمت ماذا؟ بيرك د. هذا هو...! لقد قضمته: غراي
Dr. Burke: what is this? Does anybody know what this is? Grey: Oh my God!
Dr Burke: What? Speak Grey?
Grey: She bit it off
Dr. Burke: Bit off what?
Grey: That's it ...! She bit it off

In this scene, a part of a penis is extracted from the mouth of a girl victim of aggression. The translator has identified the word 'penis' as a taboo word that needed to be reformulated, while in this case, it is used as a word of human anatomy which describes a part of the body and which does not in any way reflect any sexual connotation. The scene is in an operating theater featuring a medical team trying to save the life of a badly injured girl. The subtitler, has chosen to use again a pronoun instead of the term 'penis'. It is a pronoun which does not refer to any previously mentioned noun.

When you refer to any bilingual dictionary, Oxford or Al Mawrid Alwasit for example, they suggest the Arabic term عضو تناسلي ذكري or قضيب as a counterpart because it is a scientific lexical term which designates a part of human anatomy. Even in English, the effect of the word penis on

the audience is more tolerable than other terms which are considered derogative, such as 'dick', 'prick', etc. So, why has the subtitler manipulatively chosen not to translate the word 'penis' as suggested? If it were a science TV program, dubbers or subtitlers would not feel any embarrassment in using the term as it is. Nevertheless, it is well known that medical dramas such as *Emergency, ER, Grey's Anatomy and House*, hire teams of professional health communication advisors who revise the medical content in every episode and ensure a great degree of clinical and diagnostic accuracy. (Hestroni 2009).

The next scene confirms our claim. It is in an operating theater where the medical team is performing a surgery on the raper.

Situation: Dr Bailey is talking to Grey
Dr Bailey: Why aren't we attempting to re - stick the penis
Grey: Because teeth don't slice they tear.
دكتور بايلي: لماذا لا نحاول وصل المقطوع؟ غراي: لأن الأسنان تمزق و لاتقطع
Dr Bailey: Why aren't we attempting to re - stick the cut one
Grey: Because teeth don't slice they tear.

The conversation is about joining the two parts of a human cut organ. The context cannot have any sexual reference or connotation. Dr Baily is testing the interns' knowledge. The context is purely academic and educational. The subtitler still regards it as a sexual scene that deserves censorship.

The word المقطوع is the past participle of the verb قطع. It plays the role of the passive in which the subject is omitted.

From another scene we read these subtitles:

Situation: Grey, Chief surgeon and his secretary are discussing the penis custody
Secretary: You collected it, so you have custody.
Grey: Custody of a penis?
Dr Webber: Yes, until the cops come.
Grey: what am I supposed to do with a penis?
السكرتيرة: لقد جمعتها ، فلك حيازتها. غراي: حيازتي؟ الدكتور ويبير: نعم ، حتى يأتي رجال الشرطة. غراي: ماذا علي أن أفعل بهذا ؟
Secretary: You collected it, so you have custody.
Grey: My Custody?
Dr Webber: Yes, until the cops come.
Grey: what am I supposed to do with this

We agreed earlier that the audiovisual text is a multimodal text in which many channels of communication are used simultaneously: the 'audio/acoustic' providing words, paralinguistic information, soundtrack and special effects,

and the 'visual' channel transmits images, colors, movement, posters or captions with linguistic signs (Chaume 2013). Yet, in the two scenes above, Arab viewers cannot get any clue about the content. They would not even guess what the characters are talking about given that the key term 'penis' is manipulatively hidden. It is substituted either by a pronoun 'the letter الهاء/it' or by a demonstrative pronoun هذا

/this. In other words, the strategy used here is neither omission nor substitution. It is an allusion which is deprived of any logical reference.

From another scene, within the same context we meet the same process.

Situation: Omale wants to know what Grey is carrying.
Omale: What's that?
Grey: Don't ask! You don't want to know.
Omale: I do want to know. Really.
Grey: You do really want to know? It's a part of a penis.
Omale: Ok! I think I didn't really want to know.
أومالي: ما هذا؟ غراي: لا تسأل! أنت لا تريد أن تعرف. أومالي: أريد أن أعرف. حقاً. غراي: هل تريد حقاً أن تعرف؟ أومالي: حسناً! أعتقد أنني لا أريد أن أعرف حقاً.
Omale: What's that?
Grey: Don't ask! You don't want to know.
Omale: I do want to know. Really.
Grey: You do really want to know?
Omale: Ok! I think I didn't really want to know.

In this scene, the subtitler chooses to omit a whole sentence that contains the 'taboo word' 'penis' though that sentence is the answer to the question around which the whole exchange between the two characters revolves. Once more, the manipulative technique opted for leaving the viewer incapable of drawing a complete picture about the events in the episode. It is crystal clear, that the translator classifies

the term 'penis' as a sexual reference, and consequently deems the translation of the taboo word 'penis' morally offensive and chooses not to translate it at once.

In another scene, we witness a different type of manipulation. The strategy the translator uses is compensation. Here is the extract:

Situation: Yang is telling Grey about her surgery.
Yang: The clinic has a policy. They wouldn't let me confirm my appointment unless I designated an emergency contact person. Someone to be there, just in case, and to help me home, you know, after. Anyway, I put your name down. That's why I told you I'm pregnant. You're my 'person.'
يانغ: لدى العيادة سياسة تتبعها. لن يسمحوا لي بالمجيء إلى العيادة ما لم أعين شخصاً يتصلون به عند الطوارئ. شخص ما ليكون هناك، فقط في حالة ما، ومساعدتي في العودة إلى المنزل، كما تعلمين، بعد الولادة. على أي حال، وضعت اسمك. لهذا السبب أخبرتك أنني حامل. أنت 'شخصيتي'.
Yang: The clinic has a policy. They wouldn't let me come to the clinic unless I designated someone they could call in case of emergency. Someone to be there, just in case, and to help me to go back home, you know, after the birth. Anyway, I put your name down. That's why I told you I'm pregnant. You're my 'person.'

Earlier in this same episode, Yang informs Grey that she is pregnant and that she is not going to keep the baby. Grey discovers later that the father of the baby is their boss Dr Burke. In this scene, Yang lets her know that she has decided to go to the clinic to have an operation. The operation Yang mentions in her speech is abortion. Considering the Arabic translation, we come across the word **الولادة/birth**. It is a word which is added in the Arabic text. It is a term that the translator has manipulatively added.

Yang has a sexual relationship with her boss Dr Burke. This 'forbidden' relationship results in an 'illegitimate' pregnancy. The 'conservative' Arab viewer faces two taboo situations at the same time. So, the subtitler decides to act and 'legalize' these uncomfortable events just by the manipulative addition of a single word 'الولادة'. The strategy used here is Compensation. The translator compensates a

loss in the translation of an exchange by over - translating or adding something in another. (Diaz Cintas and Remael 2007: 206) argue that compensation may not "be practical due to the oral - visual cohabitation of the source and target languages." However, this compensation intends actually to distort that "oral - visual cohabitation" and create a fake context that is acceptable to the Arab receiver. Stopping the Arabic sentence at the level of the English one, "you know, after", could have been enough because the word abortion is not mentioned even in the English text. Yet, the subtitler wants the situation to be morally and legally approved by the audience.

In another sequence, omission is used as a manipulative strategy. The translator deletes a whole statements made by Christina.

Situation: Christina surprises her husband Dr Shepherd touching the face of Grey
Addison: Oh! Isn't this cozy? Can I join in or aren't you in threesomes?
كرستينا: أوه! أليس هذا حميمياً؟

Dr Shepherd has a sexual relationship with his intern Dr Grey. They both work at the same hospital with his wife Christina who is a visiting doctor. Her question 'Can I join in or aren't you in threesomes' is sarcastic. It is a way of teasing her husband whom she is trying to regain after she cheated on him and he left her. This combination of 'immoral' events urges the translator to act and accommodate them with the viewer's culture. In this latter's conventions, adultery is a serious sin, let alone group sex. That is why; the subtitler deems it necessary to manipulatively take this question out of the view of the Arab audience and create a comfortable situation voided of any concept that might challenge their values.

All in all, sexual references are source of embarrassment to Middle Eastern viewers. Subtitlers try to make their translations as free as possible from these references. Sometimes, these manipulations affect the meaning and create certain ambiguity for the audience. However, this seems to bother subtitlers less than breaching moral values.

2. Conclusion

Taboo words and expressions are heavily manipulated in Arabic AVT. They are generally subject to manipulative strategies to avoid any violation of the norms and standards of the target culture. We have explained earlier that there is a huge gap between the American source culture and the Arab target culture. This cultural discrepancy obliges translators to be highly alert and use high filters to sift any infringement that may affront the audience.

Swearwords in Arabic AVT are morally condemned as they are source of embarrassment to Arab viewers. They are heavily manipulated. Sometimes, they are totally omitted and some other times they are toned down, mostly by way of substitution. This is applicable also for sexual references. They cause offense to Middle Eastern viewers, especially within the family context. Translators either delete or circumvent these references by using the strategies of calquing or explicitation. However, Taboo words usually meet a phatic or exclamatory objective and the dubber / subtitler's task is to identify their emotional value for the source audience, and then try to transmit the same effect and value to the target audience. In other words, resorting to omission as a primary solution deprives the target audience of many aspects that sometimes can be decisive in determining their comprehension.

Manipulation can sometimes create some discomfort or even dissatisfaction to the viewer. To reduce the effect of heavy manipulation, the choice of the works to translate should be reconsidered. There should be standards and criteria regarding what to translate and what not to translate. I personally cannot find any sound justification that explains why a audiovisual work has to be purchased and translated while most of its content offends the viewer it is directed to. The two fictions have undergone an unreasonable huge number of manipulative acts. If a movie is culturally inappropriate or morally extremely offensive, why broadcast it at all?

References

- [1] Alkhoury, Tatiana. (2011) "Le sous - tirage dans le monde arabe: contraintes et créativité", *Traduction et médias audiovisuels*. Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 79 - 91.
- [2] Ávila - Cabrera José Javier. (2015) "An Account of the Subtitling of Offensive and Taboo Language in Tarantino's Screenplays." *Sendebare* 26, 37 - 56.
- [3] Diaz Cintas, Jorge. (2004). "In search of a theoretical framework for the study of audiovisual translation". In Pilar Orero (ed.), *Topics in audiovisual translation*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins, 21 - 34
- [4] Diaz Cintas, Jorge. (2004). "Subtitling: the long journey to academic acknowledgement" *The Journal of Specialized Translation*, 50 - 70
- [5] Díaz Cintas, Jorge and Aline, Remael. (2007). *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling*. Manchester: St Jerome.
- [6] Díaz Cintas, Jorge. (2012). "Clearing the smoke to see the screen: ideological manipulation in audiovisual translation." In Díaz Cintas (ed.) *The Manipulation of Audiovisual Translation, Meta special issue*, 279 - 293
- [7] Gamal, Mohammad. (2008). "Egypt's audiovisual translation scene." *Arab Media and Society*. <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=675>. Accessed on January 27th 2017
- [8] Hestroni, Amir. (2009). "If you must be hospitalized, TV is not the place." *Communication Research Reports* Volume 26, 2009 – Issue 4, 311 - 22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08824090903293585>
- [9] Maluf, Ramez. (2005). A potential untapped? Why dubbing has not caught on in the Arab world. *In TBS Journal*, 79 - 92
- [10] Pujol, Didac. (2006). "The Translation and Dubbing of 'Fuck' into Catalan: The Case of From Dusk till Dawn." *The Journal of Specialized Translation*
- [11] http://www.jostrans.org/issue06/art_pujol.php. Accessed on January 27th 2017
- [12] Ranzato, Irene. (2013). *The Translation of Cultural References in The Italian Dubbing of Television Series*. PhD thesis, Imperial College, London
- [13] Web 2: <https://www.britannica.com/>
- [14] Web 3: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>