

## Towards a Model of Euphemisation in Arabic Subtitling

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### Abstract

This paper examines the use of euphemisation as a politeness strategy in subtitling English audiovisual material into Arabic. It draws on core concepts of Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness (1987), such as the notion of face, face-threatening acts and redressive strategies, to explain subtitlers' choices in rendering sequences which are potentially offensive to an Arab audience. The study sets out to examine the extent to which a modified and extended model of euphemisation as a strategic output of politeness can be productively applied in the field of audiovisual translation, and specifically to subtitling from English into Arabic. This new and more eclectic model of euphemisation draws mainly on two existing models developed outside politeness theory, by Williams (1975) and Warren (1992). To account for euphemistic expressions identified in Arabic subtitles of *Friends* and not covered by the categories proposed in Williams and Warren's studies, two further categories are introduced, namely, *semantic misrepresentation* and *omission*. The model has proved helpful in capturing recurrent strategies of euphemisation employed by Arab subtitlers in dealing with a range of face-threatening acts, especially sexual references and utterances related to certain distasteful topics such as death, disease and bodily functions.

**Keywords:** Audiovisual Translation, Euphemisation, Politeness, Subtitling, The Arabic Language

## 1. Introduction

Research on subtitling in the Arab World is slowly growing despite the fact that the industry itself has started as early as the 1930s (Gamal, 2009). Needless to say, this gap needs to be addressed in order to develop the academic status of this newly emerged field of study and hopefully contribute to the improvement of the quality of subtitles shown on DVDs and many Arab satellite channels. Few researchers have investigated some semantic, cultural and linguistic issues in Arabic subtitling (Al-Adwan, 2009; Gamal, 2008; Thawabteh, 2011; etc). Therefore, this paper aims to contribute to this evolving field of academia by shedding more light on the phenomenon of euphemisation and its impact on the choices of translation strategies by Arab subtitlers.

Euphemism as a potential strategy of politeness often employed by interlocutors to save, maintain or enhance their face (Brown & Levinson 1987). Allan and Burridge stress the importance of this phenomenon in determining the relative levels of politeness employed by interlocutors, pointing out that “discussion of taboo and censoring of language naturally leads to a consideration of politeness and impoliteness, and their interaction with euphemism (sweet talking), dysphemism (speaking offensively) and orthophemism (straight talking)” (2006:29). This draws a direct link between potential face-threatening acts (such as sexual and offensive references) and euphemisation as the data analysis illustrates. Therefore, prior to investigating the use of this phenomenon in the Arabic subtitles of the tenth season of *Friends*, it is useful to address a number of issues relating to the various types of euphemisms and the devices that generate them, as discussed broadly in the available literature both in and outside politeness theory.

The word euphemism derives from the Greek word *euphemismos*, which, in its turn derives from the word *euphemizein*, referring to the use of “a good or auspicious word for an evil or inauspicious one” (Foster 1966: 53). Enright states that the word *euphemism* was first documented in English in “Thomas Blount’s *Glossographia* (1656), where it is defined as “a good or favourable interpretation of a bad word” (1986: 13). Euphemism has been generally defined as a “rhetorical device” that has a “concrete meaning”, with slight differences of definition among various dictionaries and encyclopaedias (Enright 1986: 13). *The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, for example, defines euphemism as “an indirect word or phrase that people often use to refer to something embarrassing or unpleasant, sometimes to make it seem more acceptable than it really is”. The *MSN Encarta Encyclopaedia* similarly defines euphemism as a “**less offensive synonym**: a word or phrase used in place of a term that might be considered too direct, harsh, unpleasant, or offensive” (original emphasis).

Euphemisms have been extensively reviewed and researched by scholars and linguists, generating dozens of definitions (*inter alia*: Neaman and Silver, 1995; Enright, 1986; Makin, 2003; Greene, 2000; Huang, 2005). Among these is Warren’s account of euphemism which argues that a euphemism occurs “if the interpreter perceives the use of some word or expression as evidence of a wish on the part of the speaker to denote some sensitive phenomenon in a tactful and/or veiled manner” (1992: 135). Warren points out that there are three essential elements involved in the construction of this definition. First, the connotation attached to the original word is viewed as sensitive, accounting for why the use of euphemisms is very commonly associated with specific topic areas, such as sex, insults, death, embarrassing bodily functions and so forth. Second, the substituting

word (euphemism) is less blunt or offensive than other potential alternatives. Finally, the interpreter is aware that the speaker's choice of a particular expression is motivated by his/her consideration of the face wants of the interpreter and the desire to avoid using an expression that may threaten his/her face. Like Warren (1992), Allan and Burridge approach and define the use of euphemisms as a politeness strategy, arguing that "a **euphemism** is used as an alternative to a dispreferred expression, in order to avoid possible loss of face: either one's own face or, through giving offence, that of the audience, or of some third party" (1991: 11, original emphasis). They further ascertain that the notion of face, as defined by Brown and Levinson, is extremely important in discussing any aspects of politeness, pointing out that:

Social interaction is generally oriented towards maintaining (saving face). Just as we look after our own face (self-respect), we are expected to be considerate of, and look after, the face-wants of others. Those who are skilled at this are said to have social *savoir faire*; they are said to be perceptive and diplomatic. (Allan & Burridge 2006:33)

Euphemism as "a shield against the offensive nature of taboo expressions" (Agyekum 2002: 372), then, generally refers to a speaker's use of a less offensive or disturbing substitute. In other words, a euphemistic expression attempts to disguise unpleasant or embarrassing meanings of a word or an expression by using an alternative form which still communicates the same message but in a less explicit way. Thus, McGlone & Batchelor (2003:251) point out that people usually use euphemisms when they are "reluctant to utter more semantically transparent terms (urinate, sex, pregnancy) for certain unsettling topics". This suggests that speakers use euphemistic expressions deliberately in a particular context to disguise sensitive aspects of the message without projecting their reluctance to engage in the interaction. However, interlocutors sometimes use a deliberately strong form of language in communication to undermine the public image of others; this linguistic phenomenon is referred to in the literature as *dysphemism*. By contrast to euphemism, dysphemism refers to the employment of abusive or offensive language, rather than masked expressions, to offend and threaten the face of others. A common example of dysphemism is the word *cow* in British English, which can be used as a derogative term for a woman who is thoroughly disliked.

The use of euphemisms in oral and written communication is generally associated with patterns of politeness and social norms that govern the contexts in which interlocutors operate. For example the verb *piss* (urinate) might be viewed as a rude word in a formal context (e.g. academic class), but may be evaluated as humorous in a casual context (e.g. interaction between friends). Euphemism as a linguistic phenomenon thus plays a crucial role in establishing and developing relationships between interlocutors. McGlone & Batchelor (2003: 251) stress the significance of the role played by euphemism in successful communication, and point out that various factors determine both the strength and the way in which the message is uttered:

When an unsettling topic is raised (be it bad news or some other unpleasant subject), the form of the message (bald or euphemistic) and the

manner in which it is conveyed (blithely or reluctantly) may be motivated by the communicator's empathy (i.e. concern for the addressee's positive face) or self-presentational goals (concern for one's own positive face).

In conversational encounters, Arab subtitlers usually attempt to communicate politely and avoid committing face threatening acts that may jeopardise the public image of Arab viewers. When a potential threat is evoked, euphemism as a politeness strategy is one of the most important and common mechanisms for establishing and maintaining a friction-free encounter. Enright (1986) points out that unsettling expressions are usually evoked by stimuli that might be taboo, fearsome, distasteful, or by expressions that are intrinsically loaded with negative connotations which prevent speakers from communicating their intention on a given occasion, and consequently damage their face.

A limited number of models for analysing euphemisms as strategies of politeness, in particular strategies linked to specific topics (i.e. sexual references and distasteful topics) have been introduced and elaborated in various languages, including English and Arabic (Williams, 1975; Warren, 1992; Farghal, 1995; Linfoot-Ham 2005).

Farghal (1995), for instance, proposes a model in which he examines euphemism as a pragmatic phenomenon by analysing various examples drawn mainly from Standard Arabic and colloquial Jordanian Arabic. He argues that euphemisms in Arabic flout one or more of the maxims of conversation outlined by Grice (1975), which consequently leads to the communication of specific implicatures. Farghal also suggests that Arab speakers adopt four main strategies in producing euphemisms, namely the use of figurative expressions, circumlocutions, remodelings and antonyms.

Unlike other models of euphemism, such as Williams' (1975) and Warren's (1992), the scope of Farghal's account of this phenomenon seems to be relatively narrow and exclusively restricted to Arabic. Farghal (1995) generalises the findings of his study by drawing only on four devices illustrated and supported by a few examples. As a result, this model fails to offer a solid theoretical basis that can explain the majority of the euphemisms identified in Arabic subtitling. Nevertheless, specific aspects of Farghal's model may be incorporated in the model proposed for the current study where appropriate.

Another study conducted by Mohammed (2007) adopts a prescriptive approach in investigating the errors that translators commit in rendering various euphemistic expressions in the Holy Qur'an and argues that these 'wrong' translations sacrifice the intended meaning of the Arabic text and disrupt readers' understanding of the message. The scope of his study is very limited, as Mohammed's findings are based on the analysis of two English translations of a limited number of examples<sup>1</sup>.

Euphemisation in audiovisual translation in the Arab World is an area that has been neglected by Arab researchers despite its direct impact on the quality of Arabic subtitles. In a recent study by Thawabteh 2012, for instance, he attempts to identify a set of strategies that are often employed by Arab translators when subtitling Arabic euphemisms and dysphemisms into English (see Al-Adwan 2009 for a more detailed account of euphemisation in Arabic subtitling). He concludes that euphemisation and deysphemisation are mainly approached through one of three main translation strategies: an omission of source language (SL) euphemistic or dysphemistic expressions in the target culture, a retention of SL euphemistic or dysphemistic expressions by means of

formal-based translation strategies and an addition of euphemistic or dysphemistic expressions in the target culture. However, it must be noted here that it is more common to spot euphemisms when subtitling from English into Arabic than the other way around, given the conservative nature of many Arab societies. Therefore, this paper is particularly designed to examine the phenomenon of euphemisation and propose a more comprehensive model that accounts for most of the euphemistic utterances employed in Arabic subtitling.

## 2. Towards a Politeness Theory-Oriented Model of Euphemisation in Subtitling

In explaining how euphemisms are formed, Neaman and Silver (1995) suggest that all euphemisms draw on the same psychological and linguistic features and follow the same pattern of development, regardless of their cultural and historical setting. This implies that euphemisation is a universal phenomenon employed by participants across several languages. Williams points out that “euphemism is such a pervasive human phenomenon, so deeply woven into virtually every known culture, that one is tempted to claim that every human has been pre-programmed to find ways to talk around tabooed subjects” (1975: 198).

In investigating this linguistic phenomenon, Williams (1975: 200-2) argues that euphemisms (whatever the cultural and historical setting) may be formed through five major semantic processes: borrowing, widening, semantic shifts, metaphorical transfer and phonetic distortion. Williams’ model, however, does not fully account for all the examples of euphemisms detected in the Arabic subtitles of *Friends*, and it is thus necessary to modify and complement some aspects of this model.

In the same vein, Warren (1992) outlines a helpful model that may inform a more comprehensive model of analysis to be adopted in audiovisual translation. She predominantly focuses on how word forms can be related to sets of referents in a particular context to generate various novel meanings. She claims to offer a “more detailed and exhaustive” classification of euphemisms than previous models (Warren 1992:134). She examines 500 examples drawn predominantly from Spears’ (1981) *A Dictionary of Slang and Euphemisms* (400 examples), with a further 100 examples extracted from Neaman and Silver’s (1983) *A Dictionary of Euphemisms*. In analysing these euphemisms, Warren (1992: 134-157) argues that there are four main devices that account for the majority of the examples examined, namely words formation devices, phonemic formation, loan words and semantic innovation.

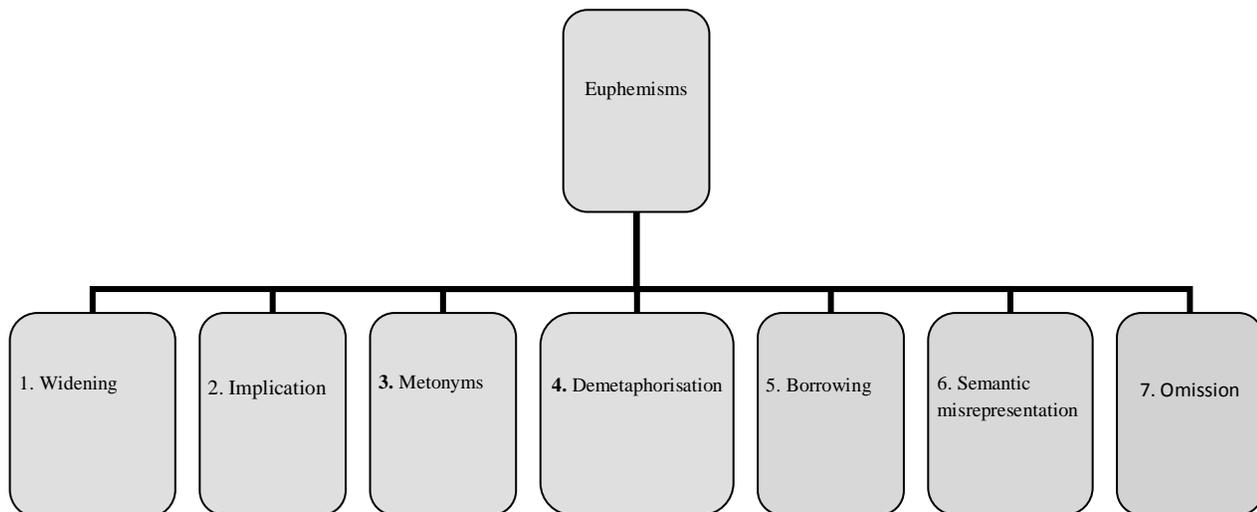
For the purposes of this study, I will exclusively draw on Warren’s last device, namely semantic innovation<sup>ii</sup>, in discussing and analysing the data derived from *Friends*. Word formation devices and phonemic modification will be disregarded in this study, since most of the processes listed under them seem to be unproductive in generating euphemisms in the medium of subtitling (see Al-Adwan 2009).

The two models of euphemisation outlined by Williams (1975) and Warren (1992) demonstrate how various word formation devices, loan words and phonemic and semantic processes contribute to the production of several types of euphemism. However, many euphemistic expressions identified in the data do not fall clearly or systematically under the set of categories outlined in one or the other model. Moreover, neither model

was designed to account for euphemisms in the context of translation or any kind of cross cultural communication.

Given that Williams' (1975) and Warren's (1992) models frequently overlap but cannot separately address all types of euphemisms identified in Arabic subtitling, common processes addressed by both models, which might be labelled differently in each account, are grouped together under unified headings, and new devices are added to this streamlined model where they prove productive in investigating face threatening acts in subtitling. Devices and sub-processes which do not feature in the current corpus and are not likely to be relevant in the context of translation, and especially in the medium of subtitling, will not be included in the revised model.

Figure 1 outlines the main components of the revised model of euphemisation, followed by a description and examples of each device:



**Figure1. A visual representation of a politeness theory-oriented model of euphemisation**

### 2.1 Widening

This involves the use of a general term to replace a more specific one in a particular

context, or the replacement of a specific cause with a generalised effect. Therefore, euphemistic phrases under this heading need to be particularised in a given context in order to provide interlocutors with logical connotations. Williams (1975), who labels this device as *widening* in his model, also stresses that it accounts for many euphemistic expressions. Linfoot-Ham (2005: 232) mentions a number of euphemisms formulated by this process, including *satisfaction* to refer to 'orgasm' and *innocent* to mean 'virginal'. These examples demonstrate that the way in which general terms are 'particularised' is highly context dependant. For example, *satisfaction* might be achieved through a variety of means, not exclusively through 'orgasm'. The term functions as a euphemism of

orgasm only in specific contexts that allow interlocutors to decode it as such. Finally, *widening* may sometimes produce euphemisms by splitting the general features between two words. Among the examples that Williams offers in explaining this process is, for instance, the euphemism *criminal assault*, which might possibly cover a wide range of acts, but by convention usually refers to rape (1975: 200). He further argues that “spreading semantic components across several words rather than delivering them in a single word lessens the impact” of the original referents (ibid.).

The following example illustrates the use of this strategy by Arab subtitlers.

<b>Monic a:</b>	(Looking at Phoebe eating something) Pheebes, spit that out, that has <b>pork</b> in it.	<b>Monic a:</b>	فيبي، ابصقي هذا فانه يحتوي على اللحم [Phoebe spit this out it has <b>meat</b> in it]
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*Pork* is a potentially distasteful item for Arab viewers, who are mostly Muslim. Since eating pork is prohibited (is a sin) in Islam, translating *pork* literally into Arabic could be seen as a challenge to Islamic instructions and teachings, thus constituting a threat to the face of many target viewers. By translating *pork* into Arabic as ‘اللحم’, ‘meat’ (another instance of *widening*), the subtitler avoids referring to a particular type of meat and successfully eliminates the source of threat in the original utterance altogether. It should also be noted that the visual image poses no challenge to the subtitle in that it is not possible to identify the meat in question as pork and hence there is no contradiction between the subtitle and the image.

## 2.2 Implication

This strategy features in Warren’s model under *implication* and in Williams’ as *semantic shifts*. Opting for *implication* rather than *semantic shifts* allows me to introduce the category of *semantic misrepresentation* (a new category I introduce and discuss as *Strategy 6* below) without risking confusion with the term *semantic shifts*. *Implication* is not as simple and straightforward as *widening*; it involves two propositions, where the second is usually a logical consequence of the first. Euphemisms generated by this process suggest their meaning implicitly, forcing the addressee to make some effort before identifying their implied value. Warren (1992: 143) explains that a euphemism is viewed as an implication if “the connection between the conventional and novel sets of referents is that of an antecedent to a consequent”, in other words if X is valid, then Y is valid too; if the conventional sense is valid then the euphemistic sense is valid too. A good example offered by Warren is the euphemism *loose*, which conventionally means ‘unattached’, and which generates the potential novel interpretation (sexually easy/available). Thus, ‘unattached’ as an established meaning of *loose* is an antecedent that leads to the construction of that novel contextual consequent. Nonetheless, in some euphemistic expressions, the established meaning may represent the consequent and the novel sense the antecedent. A good example that illustrates this case is the euphemism *bend an elbow*, when referring to drinking (alcohol). Needless to say, the established sense of this euphemism, *curve one’s arm*, is the antecedent and the new euphemistic sense, *drinking*, is the consequent; if drinking is valid, then bending the elbow is probably

valid too. Therefore, implication in this study involves producing a euphemism associated with a taboo term through antecedent-consequent relationship; when a euphemism is uttered, interlocutors indirectly retrieve its implied associated meaning.

The following example clearly features this strategy. While Chandler and Ross are telling each other what they have done at college, they discover that they have both kissed Rachel on the same day. Shocked by the news, Ross starts telling Monica what he has discovered, and Chandler then asks him why it really matters a lot to him given that this happened long time ago.

<b>Chandler:</b>	You kissed her that night too? (asking Ross)	<b>Chandler:</b>	أنت قبلتها في تلك الليلة أيضاً ؟ [You kissed her that night too?]
<b>Monica:</b>	Two guys in one night? Wow, I thought she became a <b>slut</b> after she got her nose fixed.	<b>Monica:</b>	شابان في ليلة واحدة أعتقد أنها أصبحت فاسقة بعد أن أصلحت أنفها [Two guys in one night I think she became <b>immoral</b> after she got her nose fixed]

In English, *slut* is a pejorative term for a woman who is regarded as sexually promiscuous, but it does not have any specific religious overtones. Given that this insult constitutes a serious threat to interlocutors' face in both English and Arabic, the subtitler avoids rendering it literally into Arabic, as might be expected, and instead translates it as 'فاسقة', 'immoral'. The chosen equivalent, 'فاسقة', is still offensive, and interestingly has religious overtones, but not quite as offensive as *slut*. It is also broader in its range of implications, and can be said of someone who drinks alcohol or gambles, for instance. Target viewers will still successfully conclude that Monica meant 'sexually loose' (in this context) and will capture her sarcastic tone of speech. In other words, viewers will most probably infer that Rachel has committed an immoral act (sexually, since she kissed two guys in one day). The subtitler's success in using *implication* here stems mainly from the context in which the euphemism is used.

### 2.3 Metonyms

This process is similar to *widening*: both result in general substitutions. However, *metonyms*, as the term suggests, are metonymically related to the items they substitute. Tymoczko (1999: 42) defines metonymy as "a figure of speech in which an attribute or an aspect of an entity substitutes for the entity or in which a part substitutes for the whole". However, it should be pointed out here that euphemisms produced by the process of metonymy represent the whole which conceals specific parts or attributes. In other words, the direction of the relationship between the whole and specific parts or attributes, as offered by Tymoczko, is reversed in euphemising taboo words (the euphemism represents the whole entity, which stands for specific part or attribute, not the other way around). *Metonymy*, then, broadly refers to using a word or phrase that stands for another entity associated to it in a whole-part relationship. Yet, in her analysis, Warren (1992: 149-151) argues that *metonyms* can be divided into four groups, according to the relations between the established and novel referents: (a) Casual relation, e.g. *ashes* as a

metonymic euphemism of ‘marijuana’, (b) Whole-part relation, e.g. *dress for sale*, which refers metonymically to ‘prostitute’, (c) Locative relation, as in *groin*, which metonymically refers to ‘pubic area’ (that which is at the groin), and (d) Equative relation, e.g. *silver* when used to refer to ‘cutlery’ (that which is made of silver).

To avoid potential confusion and overlap with other categories, *metonyms* will be limited in this study to the investigation of euphemisms which hold a whole-part relationship between their established and novel referents.

One of the examples that illustrate this strategy in *Friends* is the following extract that takes place in Joey’s flat. Known for being a womaniser, Joey is relaxed about having a date with his friend Rachel today. Chandler is astonished to see Joey, who is eating Pizza before his date, so relaxed and confident. Therefore, Chandler asks him about how he manages to attract many women at the same.

<p><b>Joe y:</b></p>	<p>No, I do <b>sex</b> things! First, I look deep in her eyes. Then, I kiss her. Next I take my hand and I softly <b>graze her thigh</b>.</p>	<p><b>Joe y:</b></p>	<p>لا أنا أقوم بالأشياء المثيرة في البداية أنظر بعمق بعينيها/ ثم أقبّلها ثم أحرك يدي و ألمسها برفقة [No I do <b>exciting</b> things first I look deep in her eyes then I kiss her then I move my hand and <b>touch her</b> softly]</p>
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In this dialogue, the phrase *graze her thigh* is translated into Arabic as ‘المسها’, ‘touch her’. *Metonymy* is once again used to mitigate the sexual strength of the original phrase, replacing the specific part *thigh* with reference to the ‘whole’, namely *her [body]*. While the subtitler manages to avoid threat to face through this choice, what he/she loses is a feature of Joey’s character, namely his explicit sexual approach with girls, which is toned down considerably in the Arabic version.

## 2.4 Demetaphorisation

In principle, *demetaphorisation* is primarily based on the process of metaphorisation as discussed in Williams under *metaphorical transfer* and in Warren as a device of semantic innovation, specifically under *metaphors*. In both models, this device generates euphemisms that conceal the offensive or undesirable associations of the original items, by referring to something that is seen as possessing similar features to the relevant person or object. In other words, *metaphorical transfer* relies on establishing a comparison between two unrelated sets of referents that share one important thing. Examples of metaphors that are frequently used in our daily conversation include phrases like ‘time is money’, ‘a heart of stone’, ‘a blanket of snow’, ‘I am screwed up’, and ‘he is a fox’. Neaman and Silver argue that euphemisms formulated by this device “are often romanticizings, poeticizings and softenings of the original word” (1995: 10). In her account, Warren (1992) points out that metaphorisation is a vital process of creating meaning, which has been extensively addressed and examined in the literature. Furthermore, she argues that metaphors have received more attention than other linguistic devices, including *particularisation*, *implication* and *metonyms*, probably because of “the intriguing character of metaphoric meanings”, which makes this device “more

conspicuous” (Warren 1992:147). In employing this linguistic device, interlocutors are usually faced with many possible interpretations (properties) that “connect the two referent sets and so the interpreter cannot be certain that (s)he has retrieved the intended one or ones” (Warren 1992: 147).

In the following scene, Joey has convinced Chandler and Monica to write them a recommendation letter to help them to adopt a child. However, knowing that Joey is not good enough with words, the couple asked him to draft a letter and show it to them before he sends it to the adoption agency. However, the couple are shocked when they find out that Joey has already sent off a handwritten letter, instead of a printed one.

<b>Monic a:</b>	Ugh, <b>we're screwed</b> , aren't we? You know what? Just tell me on the way to the bird store.	<b>Monic a:</b>	لقد انتهى أمرنا أليس كذلك؟ [ <b>We are finished</b> , aren't we?]
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Monica's utterance *we're screwed* would be a serious face-threatening dysphemism in an Arab context. Given that Arabs' social norms prohibit the use of such explicit sexual utterances especially in public, the subtitler opts here to defuse the threat by conveying the implied meaning into Arabic, namely 'لقد انتهى أمرنا', 'we are finished'. Monica does not literally mean that they are screwed, but rather that their efforts of adopting a baby are wasted or ruined, which will consequently affect them badly. In discussing sex/gender as a topic of metaphor, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet suggest that when the word *screw* is used, “there is the suggestion of force and of damage done to the recipient of the screw-wood into which a screw is inserted is thereafter ‘ruined’” (2003: 220). This violent, intrusive metaphor is demetaphorised in the Arabic subtitle by opting for the implied meaning ‘we are finished’.

However, *demetaphorisation*, as the term suggests, differs from metaphorisation in the direction of formulation. In other words, following this process results in defusing the metaphorical sense (distasteful, offensive or inappropriate) of a given utterance, usually generating a euphemised alternative. Consequently, this device is specifically introduced in this model to account for several examples of euphemisms identified in a particularly challenging mode of translation, namely subtitling. As the data analysis reveals, this strategy is used in subtitling to neutralise metaphorical expressions which are often employed by interlocutors as dysphemisms to express their anger, frustration or dissatisfaction.

## 2.5 Borrowing

Listed as *borrowing* in Williams' model and as *loan words* in Warren's, this is one of the major devices for generating euphemisms and a significant source for adding new words to a language. In this process, interlocutors import words (euphemisms) from other languages to refer to offensive or inappropriate elements, and it is the foreign origin and initial unfamiliarity of the borrowed item that allows it to mitigate potential offence.

The following dialogue is taking place in Central Perk, where Ross and Rachel are trying hard to convince Chandler and Monica to postpone their planned trip to Vermont so that they can attend Emma's first birthday.

<b>Monica:</b>	Well, I'm sorry, but Chandler and I could really use a weekend away. You know, to reconnect... emotionally.	<b>Monica:</b>	نحن اسفون لكن أنا و تشاندلر لدينا الفرصة لكي نساافر في عطلة نهاية الأسبوع لكي نعيد الأتصال فيما بيننا من ناحية المشاعر [We are sorry but Chandler and I have the chance to travel during the weekend holiday to reconnect emotionally]
<b>Chandler:</b>	There is this thing I really want us to do. I read about it in <i>Maxim</i> <sup>iii</sup> .	<b>Chandler:</b>	و هناك شيء أريد فعلاً أن نفعله لقد قرأت عنه في مجلة (ماكسم) [And there is something I really want us to do, which I read about in Maxim's magazine ]
<b>Rachel:</b>	Well, can't you just go to Vermont the next day?	<b>Rachel:</b>	ألا يمكننا الذهاب الى هناك في اليوم التالي؟ [Can't you go there the next day?]
<b>Ross:</b>	Yeah, we want everyone to be there. As much as I hate to delay you doing weird sex stuff to my little sister.	<b>Ross:</b>	نعم لأننا نود من الجميع التواجد هناك نود ذلك بنفس القدر الذي أكره به تأخيرك على القيام بالأشياء الغريبة لأختي الصغيرة [Yes because we want everyone to be there we want that as much as I hate to delay you doing weird stuff to my little sister ]

In this extract, the word sex is perceived as posing a threat to the face of the target viewers. Therefore, the subtitler decides here to sacrifice sex in the Arabic subtitle, opting for eliminating any potential threat that this word may trigger (see strategy 7 Omission). Moreover, although Chandler indirectly reveals his intention to do sexual things that he has read about in *Maxim*, a very popular men's magazine featuring articles about sex and pictures of popular actresses, singers and female models, the Arabic subtitles will probably still manage to conceal any sexual element triggered by the reference to this magazine, even though the title is translated literally, since it is rarely circulated in the Arab world. In other words, importing the term *Maxim* into the Arabic subtitle will not add any sexual dimension to this dialogue, since the majority of Arab viewers are not familiar with the magazine and its sexual content. Consequently, the combination of borrowing the word *Maxim* into Arabic and omitting sex produces a modified version of the original exchange, one that is free of any direct sexual reference that may damage the

face of the Arab viewers, though of course the reference to ‘weird stuff’ may indirectly signal similar meanings.

Finally, two new categories which do not appear in Williams’ or Warren’s models, need to be integrated into the modified model, namely *semantic misrepresentation* and *omission* (Don’t do the FTA).

## 2.6 Semantic misrepresentation

This process relies crucially on shifts across various semantic fields in a particular context, leading to the production of a type of euphemism that is very specific to the context of translation. This device sacrifices the semantic content of the offending item in favour of a substitute, often derived from a different semantic field, which completely avoids the offensive reference. In other words, employing *semantic misrepresentation* leads to the production of semantically inaccurate or even a false representation of the original reference, by replacing the relevant (offensive) items with a semantically non-equivalent content (euphemisms).

In the following example, Rachel and Joey who are involved in a secret relationship decide that this is the right time to tell Ross about their affair on the plane. Ross is sitting next to Joey on the plane, praising him and being nice to him. This makes Joey happy but he cannot tell Ross that he is involved with Rachel. Having finished his conversation, Ross walks with a smile on his face to the back of the plane, where he meets Rachel. Rachel thinks that Joey has told Ross about their relationship, and that Ross is comfortable with the situation:

<b>Ross:</b>	Well, I'm so excited about this.	<b>Ross:</b>	أنا متحمس جداً حيال هذا [I am so excited about this]
<b>Rachel</b> :	Really? Excited?	<b>Rachel</b> :	حقاً؟ متحمس؟ [Really? Excited?]
<b>Ross:</b>	Are you kidding? I have had some very <b>dirty</b> dreams about this...	<b>Ross:</b>	ماذا هل تمزحين لقد رأيت أحلاماً سيئة جداً حول هذا [What are you kidding I have had/seen very <b>bad</b> dreams about this]

Here, *very dirty dreams* clearly refers to sexual dreams. However, the expression *dirty dreams* is subtitled into Arabic as ‘أحلاماً سيئة’, ‘bad dreams’, which clearly does not only eliminate the sexual connotation of the expression but also communicates to the Arab viewers a meaning that is significantly different from the original. Needless to say, this *semantic misrepresentation* of the English utterance distorts the intended meaning and impacts negatively on viewers’ understanding of the original dialogue. The target viewers may well assume that Ross is frightened of flying, for instance, and this could make it difficult for them to follow the progress of events, quite apart from missing the humour of the original.

In investigating the nature of euphemism in Arabic, Farghal (1995: 375) proposes a similar device of euphemisation, namely *remodelings*. However, it must be noted that,

unlike *semantic misrepresentation*, this process generates ‘funny sounding’ euphemisms that often serve to remind interlocutors of the undesirable words. Thus, sound rhyming between the taboo term and its mitigated counterpart is essential in generating remodelings, but it is completely irrelevant to the concept of semantic misrepresentation.

### 2.7 Omission

This strategy is normally employed when the calculated weight of the verbal act is very high. If a taboo or uncomfortable item is deemed to be seriously offensive or face threatening (if it cannot be tolerated), interlocutors tend to mitigate the strength of the message by refraining from uttering the item/message at all, thus eliminating the threat altogether. This strategy thus represents the extreme end of the processes of euphemisation; the offensive content of the original cannot be softened or euphemised any further. Unlike Brown and Levinson (1987), who do not associate ‘Don’t do the FTA’ with euphemisation, this study argues that ‘Don’t do the FTA’ is a vital strategy of linguistic politeness that is followed by Arab subtitlers in euphemising many offensive or unpalatable terms.

In the following example, everyone is in Rachel and Joey’s flat getting ready to celebrate the first birthday of Ross and Rachel’s daughter. Ross eagerly opens the box containing the cake, which Rachel has ordered, to discover that his daughter’s picture is placed on a cake in the shape of a penis, instead of a bunny. Shocked by what he has just discovered, Ross tries to find out how this could have possibly happened.

<b>Rachel</b> :	Ross, what are you talking about? (she sees the cake) oh! Oh my God! They put my baby’s face on a <b>penis</b> !	<b>Rachel</b> :	روس، ما الذي تقوله؟ يا الهي لقد وضعوا صورة وجه ابنتي على ... [Ross, what are saying? Oh my God they put my daughter’s face on ... ]
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In translating Rachel’s turn, the subtitler explicitly signals his employment of the strategy of *omission* through using a deletion mark, three full stops. The explicit reference to a male sexual organ is omitted altogether rather than substituted with another element. Needless to say, the target viewers will realise from reading the subtitled version of Rachel’s turn that an integral component of the sentence is missing. The subtitle could have still made sense had the camera allowed us to see the cake in the shape of a penis. However, this information is not available visually, neither in the original nor in the subtitled version. The humour triggered by the reference to *penis* and the image suggested in viewers’ mind remain inaccessible to the target viewers, who will not identify the reason behind Ross and Rachel’s extreme anger after seeing the cake. However, the employment of *omission* here certainly protects the face of the target viewers and saves them from being embarrassed. In subtitling humour, Diaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 2014) argue that this process “requires insight and creativity, but it is also a matter of establishing priorities. Humour can occur on different levels: it can arise from the interaction between word and image”.

### 3. Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored various issues related to the phenomenon of euphemisation as a politeness strategy and its significant impact on the Arabic subtitles of *Friends*, as discussed broadly in the literature. After testing Williams' (1975) and Warren's (1992) models of euphemisms against several examples extracted from the Arabic subtitles of the tenth season of *Friends*, I proposed a modified politeness-oriented version of the two models. However, given that the devices of euphemisation of these two models are primarily designed to operate in monolingual settings, it was further necessary to introduce new strategies to strengthen the effectiveness of the model, and consequently expand its applicability, beyond the boundaries of a single language, to the medium of subtitling. To achieve this end, two new strategies, namely *semantic misrepresentation* and *omission* have been introduced and integrated in the model. This model can be fruitfully employed as a framework for conducting a pragmatic analysis of Arabic-subtitled versions of various English audiovisual products.

It would be interesting to use this model to identify the types of topics and areas that are most commonly euphemised by Arab subtitlers by examining a wider range of audiovisual material related to various genres. It would also be interesting to test the validity of this model in the field of audiovisual translation by applying it to other combinations of languages, other than English and Arabic.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that euphemism as a politeness strategy plays a vital role in establishing and promoting a smoother and friction-free form of interaction in the Arabic subtitles of *Friends*, despite the fact that it is not properly researched and examined by Arab translators. The findings offer a contribution towards stimulating much needed research on audiovisual translation in the Arab world, as well as research on linguistic politeness, more specifically the treatment of euphemisation as a key strategic output of politeness.

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#### Notes

<sup>i</sup> The two English translations are Zidan's *The Glorious Quran Text and Translation* and Pickthall's *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*.

<sup>ii</sup> This process generates a new sense for some established words or phrases. Warren (ibid.: 134) divides this heading into seven main processes, and offers the following examples for each: particularizations<sup>ii</sup> ('growth' for cancer), implications ('go to the toilet' for defecate/urinate), metaphors ('blossom' for pimple), metonyms ('back' for bum), reversals ('blessed' for damned), understatements ('drug habit' for drug addiction) and overstatements ('sanitary engineer' for garbage man and 'visual engineer' for window cleaner). In analysing her data, Warren places special emphasis on this heading (some of these processes will be discussed in more detail later in this paper).

<sup>iii</sup> More information about this magazine can be obtained from its website at: <http://www.maxim.com/index.aspx>

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