

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