# Attenuating Obscenity of Swearwords in the Amateur Subtitling of English Movies into Arabic

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**Abstract**
The interlingual subtitling of swearwords poses problems to translators due to differences in the degree of tolerating the obscenity of such words by various speech communities. To account for the perplexities incurred in the intercultural transference of swearwords, translators adopt attenuation strategies that facilitate their mediating role between cultures. In line with this, the present study attempts to identify the strategies adopted by Arab amateur subtitlers to mitigate the obscenity of swearwords in English movies. It utilizes a corpus-based approach to identify the factors affecting the decisions made by these subtitlers. The content analysis method was used in categorizing swearwords and in the translation comparison process, Toury's (1996) 'coupled pairs' model was adopted to identify attenuation strategies. The findings revealed that the common strategies used to mitigate the obscenity of swearwords are deletion, change of semantic fields, register shift and the use of archaic words, using euphemistic expressions, generalization and linguistic substitution and ambiguity. Moreover, cultural norms play a significant role in choosing the translation strategy to handle swearwords.
*Keywords:* amateur subtitling, attenuation, swearwords, translation behavior

**Introduction**

The digital revolution has brought nations very close to each other; the physical borders have been removed making the world a very small village with globalization. As a result of this physical approximation, cultural interaction has tremendously increased via the fast and convenient access to means of communication. Such an attractive environment has invoked the desire of enthusiastic people to learn more about the peculiarities of other cultures. Their desire was nourished through the consumption of audiovisual productions such as films and TV programs as platforms that represent good reflections of the traditions, customs and life styles of the culture they depict. Nowadays, people can access such productions via TV satellite channels, YouTube, Internet websites and even personal mobile phones whereby they can watch whatever they like anytime and everywhere (Orrego-Carmona, 2012). As a result, people abandoned the traditional ways of acquiring knowledge through reading books and exploited the digital facilities for that end. According to Gambier (2009), people nowadays acquire knowledge via watching subtitled audiovisual products much more than reading books.

The need for foreign audiovisual productions has given prominence to audiovisual translation as an active discipline within Translation Studies (Baker, 2001). The fact that most audiovisual productions are produced in English makes the translation of such productions into the consumers' native language mandatory. This situation poses a challenge on translators due to the increase demand on translated films and TV programs (Diaz-Cintas, 2005). As is well-known, the most important mediums for translating such productions are subtitling and dubbing. The choice between these two mediums is based on economic and ideological considerations, hence, subtitling has become prominent because it is cheaper, faster and it preserves the authenticity of the original text (Chiaro, 2009).

Due to the delay of the official release of subtitled movies, eager movie fans with good command of English and the subtitling apparatus established forums and Internet logs to undertake the subtitling of foreign movies for their peer movie fans. These were referred to as amateur or fan subtitlers (fansubbers) who exploit the user-friendly subtitling software freely available on the Internet to carry out the subtitling of movies, upload their subtitles and disseminate them worldwide.

This phenomenon is not new and according to Diaz-Cintas and Sanchez (2006) it had its roots in the 1980s signaling a "subtitled version of a Japanese anime program." (p. 37). Fansubbing became common when a great deal of anime consumers began participating in the subtitling of such programs. Initially, when it was difficult for fans of Japanese anime programs to understand Japanese, they collaborated through pirating a copy of each anime and subtitling it into English. Later, this same idea was adopted in other spheres particularly in movie subtitling.

What characterizes amateur subtitlers is that they carry out movie subtitling on free basis because they conceive subtitling as hobby (Luczaj, Holy-Luczaj & Cwiek-Rogalska. (2014).They are motivated by their desire to be the first to do the subtitling and help other fans comprehend the storyline of the foreign movie.  Fernández-Costales (2012, p. 9) describes the amateur subtitling notion as "the practice of subtitling audiovisual material by fans for fans". Since amateur subtitlers are themselves movie fans, they would best understand their peers' needs. Accordingly, the 'corrupt' professional subtitling approach which removes all cultural

specificities by adopting 'domestication' as translation orientation, is challenged by the amateur subtitling which is 'abusive' and makes viewers able to experience the peculiarities of foreign cultures through adopting 'foreignization' as translation orientatio. (Nornes, 1999). This revolt against professional subtitling conventions represents a distinctive feature of amateur subtitlers. Accordingly, they are usually characterized as being more creative in comparison with professional subtitlers (Diaz-Cintas 2005 & Costales 2012).

However, amateur subtitlers lack formal translation training and they are said to be of low linguistic and pragmatic competency (Bogucki, 2009;  La Forge & Tonin, 2014). In addition, they lack censoring or editing of their translation performances. Such an environment can affect the performance of the subtitlers particularly when handling cultural specific issues including swearwords in movies when moving from an open culture into a very conservative one such as the Arab culture.

A noticeable phenomenon that goes hand in hand with the aforementioned developments in the status of audiovisual translation is the increasing use of swearwords in English movies. According to Jay (1992, p. 223) "there has been a progressive increase in the amount of swearing in motion pictures over time." Moreover, for Bucaria (2009, p. 16), the deployment of "swearing, sexual explicitness, and extreme violence" has become "part of the DNA" of American movies and TV shows. The use of swearwords, puns, repetitions, interjections, hesitations and slot fillers characteristic of spontaneous speech is meant to make the movie more realistic. It represents a reflection of the manipulation of language in different spheres of life by different people to achieve certain pragmatic functions. When it comes to swearwords, they are mainly used to express inner feelings such as anger, frustration, annoyance, surprise, happiness, power, solidarity and group membership. However, to express such functions, the literal meaning of swearwords is ruled out (Andersson & Trudgill, 1990). Moreover, since swearwords refer to taboo objects or activities, they are perceived as disgusting and are face threatening due to the feelings they invoke.

During the intercultural subtitling process, swearwords pose problems to translators particularly those with little experience. Such words require great care in subtitling for two reasons. Firstly, according to Ivarsson and Carroll (1998, p. 126), swearwords "seem to have a stronger effect in writing than in speech". Secondly, cultures differ in their tolerance of offensive language specially when displayed in public. Thus, in certain cases the cultural and ideological factors may have a more restrictive effect on the subtitler than the technical constraints characteristic of subtitling (Fawcett, 2003).

It is interesting to note that the problems incurred in subtitling swearwords in foreign movies into Arabic have attracted the attention of some Arab scholars (notably, Kuddro, (2000); Al-Bin-Ali, (2006);  Mazid,  (2006). The difficulty of rendering swearwords was highlighted by these scholars. However, none of their studies was solely devoted to identify the strategies adopted to attenuate the obscenity of swearwords or the factors influencing the decision making process. More importantly, none of them has addressed the amateur subtitling phenomenon.

With this in mind, the present study attempts 1) to identify the translation strategies adopted by amateur subtitlers to attenuate the obscenity of swearwords in English movies

subtitled into Arabic, and 2) to highlight the factors influencing the decisions made by these subtitlers in their treatment of swearwords when rendered into Arabic.

**Review of related literature**

The Amateur/nonprofessional subtitling phenomenon is gaining momentum nowadays as evidenced by the increasing number of studies carried out in this field (Orrego-Carmona, 2014). Several scholars have directed attention to approach this infant phenomenon from different perspectives despite its dubious nature. The focus of scholars centered on issues such as translation patterns adopted by amateur subtitlers, problems they encounter, and comparisons between the performance of amateur and professional subtitlers.

Regarding handling swearwords in intercultural subtitling, scholars indicated inconsistency in amateur subtitlers' behavior. For example, Garcia-Manchon (2013) carried out a qualitative study on a number of English movies with high occurrences of swearwords and their professional and amateur subtitles in Spanish. The findings of the study highlighted omission as the most dominant strategy used resulting in a reduction in the number of swearwords in both the professional and amateur subtitles compared with the original text. However, omission in the professionally subtitled versions was higher than that in the amateur subtitling, indicating a more censoring trend of professional subtitlers.

Similarly, Massidda (2013) compared the translation behavior of professional and amateur subtitlers in rendering offensive language in the English movie 'Californication'. The findings of this study indicated that while professional subtitlers mitigated or euphemized swearwords like 'motherfucker', 'dick', and 'asshole' into 'son of a good mother', 'biscuit' and 'idiot', respectively, amateur subtitlers rendered them faithfully.

In another study on Chinese amateur subtitling, Tian (2011) found that subtitlers adopted self-censoring of swearwords when subtitling American TV shows into Chinese. They either deleted swearwords or replaced them with random symbols such as '*&^%&'. Furthermore, the phrase 'stop words' was used to replace swearwords like 'son of a bitch' to become 'son of a stop word'.

As for scholarly on subtitling English movies into Arabic, reviewing the literature revealed some scattering  references to the treatment of swearwords in studies conducted in this field. To begin with, Kuddro (2000) proposed the censoring of swearwords and religious references when subtitling foreign movies into Arabic because Arab audiences scorn the display of such references on the screen. The recommended censoring strategies included deletion and dynamic translation.

Similarly, Al-Bin-Ali (2006) warned against the irrational handling of swearwords into Arabic because their display can 'shock' the Arab viewers. The findings of her study revealed inconsistency in the strategies used to subtitle swearwords into Arabic. In some cases such words were euphemized while in others they were literally rendered.

Moreover, Mazid (2006) argued that Arab subtitlers adopted 'chunking' as translation strategy proposed by Katan (1999) in their treatment of swearwords. Accordingly, 'fuck' was chunked sideway in Arabic into [ضاجع] (Lit. slept with). Mazid believes that although this

strategy might remove the emotive overtone from the swearword, the translation product is more acceptable because the equivalent colloquial Arabic word "cannot be written on screen in an Arab culture." (p. 93). He, thus, encouraged subtitlers to analyze the context in which the swearword is used to decide to translate or leave it out.

The previous studies collectively point to inconsistency in the strategies adopted for rendering swearwords into Arabic and that each subtitler employed strategies as suited his/her perspective; a case implicating the difficulty of handling the sensitive issue of swearwords. This renders unattainable the formulation of a systematic categorization of translation strategies for attenuating swearwords as a referenced index. It is clear that the aforementioned studies conducted on subtitling English movies into Arabic were not exclusively meant to identify the translation strategies for mitigating swearwords. Furthermore, they focused mainly on the professional subtitling and completely neglected the amateur subtitling. Therefore, the value of the present study lies in its contribution to fill this gap in the literature by focusing on the of Arab amateur subtitlers' translation behavior with respect to the strategies they employ when handling swearwords and the factors influencing their translation decision-making processes.

**Characteristics of interlingual subtitling**

Interlingual subtitling is an audiovisual communication process aiming at assisting audiences unfamiliar with the film's language or TV program to comprehend its dialogue and follow the developments of the storyline. According to Diaz-Cintas and Remael (2007, p. 8), subtitling is a

> Translation practice that consists of presenting a written text, generally on the lower part of the screen, that endeavors to recount the original dialogue of the speakers, as well as the discursive elements that appear in the image . . ., and the information that is contained on the sound-track . . . .

In comparison with other types of audiovisual translation including dubbing and voice-over, interlingual subtitling implies two shifts in language medium; one from the spoken to the written mode and another from the movie language into another language. This compound process renders interlingual subtitling 'diagonal' and 'diasemiotic' while dubbing and voice-over are 'isosemiotis' since they maintain the same mode (spoken to spoken) (Gottlieb 2001, p. 17).

The shift from the spoken to the written mode entails the eradication of most of the 'redundant' elements characteristic of face to face interactions such as repetitions, intonation and swearwords among others. Such 'redundant' elements are useful in lubricating people's everyday use of language, facilitating comprehension and in communicating some other pragmatic functions. As a result of this elimination, the subtitler usually attempts to exploit the visual, verbal and nonverbal codes provided by the polysemiotic nature of the movie texture to facilitate the viewer's understanding and communicate the intended meaning.

The reduction referred to above is necessitated by the technical (spatial and temporal) constraints characteristic of subtitling. As for the spatial constraint, the number of lines to appear on the screen should not exceed two per subtitle with a total of (35-40) characters per line (Ivarsson & Carroll 1998). Such a limitation is necessary in order not to occupy a big portion of

the small TV screen and disturb the viewer's enjoyment form watching the movie. The temporal constraint stems from the synchronization that should be achieved between the actors' utterances and the added subtitles. A care should be taken to regulate the appearance and disappearance of the subtitles with the moment an actor begins and finishes his/her utterance. Unless synchronization is maintained, confusion may ensue resulting in an overlap between the turn shifts and appearing subtitles. To reiterate, subtitles may either appear before an actor starts speaking or remain longer than necessary whereby another actor starts speaking, making the viewer unable to identify the speaker and corresponding subtitles. In relation to this, Ivarsson and Carroll (1998) suggest that the amount of time for subtitles to remain on the screen should not be less than one and a half seconds and it should not exceed six seconds depending on the number of lines in the subtitle.

Another characteristic of interlingual subtitling is the concurrency between the spoken language in the source text and the added subtitles in the target language. This represents another restrictive factor for the subtitler because every viewer with reasonable knowledge of the movie's language is able to judge the quality of the subtitling (Gottlieb, 2001). Dubbing and voice-over, on the other hand, 'hide' the original soundtrack, hence giving the translator more freedom to edit and tailor the translation to make it conform to the viewers' 'expectations' (Chesterman, 1997). However, keeping the original soundtrack intact gives more authenticity to subtitling in comparison with dubbing and voice over as it maintains the sense of otherness which is an essential objective behind watching foreign movies.

What the previous account of the characteristics of interlingual subtitling entails is the fact that the subtitlers work under different competing forces; the physical, technical, linguistic and cultural. This state of affairs led scholars to describe interlingual subtitling as a 'constrained translation' (Titford, 1982), or as an act of adaptation.

**Methodology**

After an account of the criteria followed in selecting the movie that represents the corpus of the study is given, the data collection and analysis stage is clarified in detail. In the analysis process, the translation strategies adopted to attenuate obscenity are presented and discussed with typical illustrative examples. When discussing the translation strategy 'change in sematic field', Allan and Burridge's (2006) model was adopted with some modification. The selection of this model is justified since it categorizes swearwords according to the sematic field each word belongs to.

*Research approach*

The study is qualitative in nature and aims at identifying the translation strategies adopted in mitigating the obscenity of swearwords in the English movie when subtitled into Arabic. Specifically, it focused on the subtitles of only one movie (*Alpha Dog 2006*) which contains high occurrences of swearwords to constitute its corpus. The movie was selected based on three criteria:

First, it contains the highest occurrences of swearwords (773) for a time span extending from 2000 to 2010. The ten-year-period identified was deemed sufficient of the movies produced in this time span to be representative of the genre. The fact that this movie contains the highest

number of swearwords was verified by Moad's (2011) list of movies which most frequently use the word 'fuck'. From among the American crime drama movies produced in this period, the movie *Alpha Dog* displays the highest occurrences (367) of this word.

Second, the movie is from the American crime drama genre which displays confrontations and conflicts between characters including gangsters, drug dealers and murderers and the police which instigate them to excessively use swearwords for certain pragmatic purposes. According to Parini (2013), the use of swearwords is common in American films, particularly in "spy, mafia and gangster films, films starring drug addicts and dealers, prostitutes, homeless people, soldiers, convicts, warders, and policemen." (p. 154). Besides, unlike in other genres, subtitles in the crime drama genre are indispensible for viewers to understand the actions. Hence, the subtitling of the crime drama genre, according to Minchinton (1993 cited in De Linde 1995), represents a challenge for the translator and the viewers as almost a full account of the movie dialogue should be rendered in the subtitles. Moreover, most of the movies broadcast in the Arab World are produced by Hollywood in America (Gamal, 2008).

Third, it is a popular movie and its source dialogue scripts and subtitles can be downloaded from the Internet. The dialogue scripts were downloaded from the website http://www.opensubtitles.org/en/search while its subtitles in Arabic were downloaded from http://www.subscenes.com.

### Data collection

The data collection of the study included two stages: 1) the downloading of the dialogue scripts of the movie and its Arabic subtitles and 2) the extraction of all instances of swearwords found in the resulting corpus. After the dialogue scripts of the movie and its subtitles were downloaded, they were converted to the *.txt* format to be more searchable using computing software. Then, they were placed side by side to make a parallel corpus and the *antconc 3.2.4w* concordancing program designed by Anthony (2013) was used in the search for swearwords in this corpus. This facility searches for key words in context (KWIC). It was fed with swearwords from Greenspan's (2010) list of the eleven most recurrent ones in American TV including 'fuck, hell, ass, damn, shit, bitch, penis, vagina and genitals, crap, screw, suck and piss' and their derivations. Another manual search was done to ensure that all swearwords were extracted.

### Data analysis

The content analysis method was adopted in the analysis stage whereby all instances of swearwords in the dialogue scripts and subtitles were identified. Toury's (1995) 'coupled pairs' model of translation was then used to compare the 'replacing' with the 'replaced' elements in the source and target texts. This implies that any swearword in the dialogue scripts was picked and compared with its counterpart in the subtitles. Toury's model is based on the notion that translators have linguistic repertoire of the source and the target languages in the form of coupled pairs. In any translation activity, translators automatically elicit equivalents form the target language repertoire to replace source language elements.

### Results and discussion

The analysis of the corpus revealed six translation strategies adopted by the amateur subtitler to attenuate swearwords when subtitling the English movie into Arabic. The discussion of the strategies begins with a brief account of each strategy using illustrative examples. A literal back translation of each illustrative example is provided to highlight the adopted attenuating

strategy to readers unfamiliar with Arabic. Furthermore, the discussed swearword in the source text and its counterpart in the target text are underlined to facilitate reference.

### Deletion

The deletion strategy implies the complete omission of the swearword in the subtitles and is justified on the basis that swearwords are semantically insignificant and culturally objectionable (Hjort, 2009). Therefore, deleting them provides space for more important elements for the development of the storyline in the movie. Moreover, it might eliminate the chances of objecting at the translation outcome in the target culture as it works into meeting the recipients' expectations. In other words, the subtitler resorted to the most vivid 'domestication' translation strategy when s/he did not provide an equivalent for the swearword used in the movie dialogue on cultural grounds. (Venuti, 1995). As a result of deletion, 364 (47.08%) out of the total number of swearwords were deleted. To see whether the technical constraints alone have motivated deletion, consider the following example:

Example 1

- That's not fair.                                           (Lit. this is unfair.) هذا ليس عدلا

- Don't <u>fucking</u> touch me!                            (Don't ------- touch me!) لا تلمسيني

As can be seen in example 1 above, the intensifying swearword 'fucking' was not rendered in the subtitles. The number of characters of the Arabic subtitle corresponding to that in the original text is only eight implying that space was not the major constraint to necessitate deletion. It can be argued that the cultural factor was the reason for deleting the swearword on the basis that it is mainly used as an emphatic expletive with little semantic value. More importantly, its equivalent in Arabic would be more offensive to the Arab viewers. The offense stems from the fact that swearwords pertaining to sexual blatancy face-threat Arab viewers who consider watching movies as a cultural activity whereby all family members set together for that purpose.

However, it can be argued that the Arab audiences can sense the absence of the English swearword 'fucking' in the subtitles for two reasons; English swearwords are rather pervasive nowadays (Mazid, 2006), and the feedback effect from the image on the screen, i.e. the furious shouting of the speaker and his/her body movement.

### Change in semantic field

This strategy portrays a situation in which the subtitler changed the semantic field of swearwords in the source text into a different semantic field in the target language in an attempt to attenuate obscenity. Thus, it is clear that the change was motivated solely by cultural and ideological consideration (Luyken, Thomas, Helen & Herman S. (1991).

In order to give a more vivid picture of this tendency, all swearwords in both sub-corpora were categorized according to the semantic field each word belongs to. The model adopted in this categorization was that of Allan and Burridge (2006) with some modification to encompass the various types of swearwords found in both sub-corpora. For example, the categories animals, incest and prostitution were added since they were frequently used in the corpus. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 1

**Table 1. Categorization of sematic fields of English and Arabic swearwords in Alpha Dog**

| No. | Semantic fields | Hits in English corpus | Hits in Arabic subtitles |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Religious references | 32 | 180 |
| 2. | Naming, addressing, viewing persons | 51 | 62 |
| 3. | Diseases, death/killing | 51 | 52 |
| 4. | Animals | 58 | 58 |
| 5. | Incest | 41 | ---- |
| 6. | Prostitution | 29 | 21 |
| 7. | Organs & acts of sex | 444 | 14 |
| 8. | Body parts & effluvia | 18 | 22 |

As can be seen from Table 1 above, there is a significant variation in the distribution of English swearwords into the sematic fields they belong to compared with those in the Arabic subtitles. This variation reflects interesting facts of great relevance to the attempts meant to attenuate the obscenity of swearwords. For example, whilst the category 'organs and acts of sex' ranked first in the number of occurrences of swearwords in the English sub-corpus with 444, it was the least in the Arabic sub-corpus with only 14 hits. This goes in line with the opinion that sexual references and blasphemies are among the most objectionable elements to consider when subtitling into Arabic (Gamal, 2008). Consequently, the elimination of this great number of swearwords from this category indicates an inclination towards mitigating the obscenity of such words for the recipients. In addition, incest references such as 'motherfucking', 'motherfucker(s)' and 'motherfuck' in the English sub-corpus were completely removed and replaced by general or archaic words in the Arabic sub-corpus. For instance, 'motherfucker' was rendered into [ سافل، ابن حمقى، ابناء ] (Lit. villain, son of raffish, son of the damned) and 'motherfuckers' into [ سافلة، ابن اللعينة العاهرات، لعينون] (Lit. idiot, sons of the salacious, cursed) which are devoid of the reference to incest. The reason behind this tendency is that, besides being religiously forbidden, incest is perceived as an obnoxious, gruesome and disgusting act. According to Sagarin (1968, p. 139), incest references have the "ability to incite aggressive anger even among people who have developed an armor defense against the insults derived from obscenity." This feeling is triggered by the fear that "the image of the mother as pure and inviolate is damaged when the tabooed sounds are spoken." Therefore, deleting such references shows that the subtitler is abiding by norms in the target culture. Contrariwise, the 'diseases, death/killing' and 'animals' fields were kept almost intact, maybe because these indicate general activities and universal experiences shared by both cultures or, more importantly, they lack the sexual overtones inducing the highest degree of objection by Arab viewers. Consider the following example:

Example 2

Look at these fucking wannabe <u>motherfuckers</u>                    أنظر لهؤلاء <u>الحمقى</u>

(Lit. Look at these <u>idiots</u>.)

As can be seen in example 2, the degree of obscenity relayed by the use of a string of offensive words from the sex and incest semantic fields in the source text (fucking, motherfuckers) has been diluted by deleting the words 'fucking' and 'wannabe' and ameliorating the reference to incest embodied in the word 'motherfuckers' through the use of the word [حمقى] (Lit. idiot), from the mental disorder field.

Finally, it seems that the subtitler found shield in the 'religious' semantic field to attenuate the obscenity of swearwords. This is evidenced from the great variation of occurrences of swearwords from this sematic field between the source and the target texts. To reiterate, whilst in the English sub-corpus there are only 32 hits from the 'religious' field, the Arabic sub-corpus displays 180 hits from this field. Thus, certain swearwords from other fields such as 'organs and acts of sex' or 'body parts and effluvia' were replaced by equivalents from the 'religious' semantic field in Arabic. For example, 'fuck' was rendered into [لعين] (Lit. damned) and 'shit' into [تبا] (Lit. May evil befall). It is also interesting to note that the word [لعين] (Lit. damned) scored 81 hits and the word [تبا] (Lit. May evils befall) scored 80 hits in the target text replacing mainly words such as 'fuck' and 'shit' in the source text. The following is an illustrative example:

Example 3

I don't want to hear any <u>fucking</u> stories.          لا اريد أن اسمع أي قصص
لعينة

(Lit. I don't want to listen to any <u>damned</u> stories.)

In example 3, the sex activity swearword 'fuck' in the source text was replaced by the religious swearword 'laeenah', [damned] in the Arabic subtitles to attenuate obscenity.

### *Register shift and use of archaic words*

As was previously discussed, subtitling implies a shift from the spoken to the written mode of language. In case of subtitling into Arabic, this shift entails another change from the informal colloquial language variety in the movie to the formal standard variety in the subtitles. It is interesting to note that the variety used in subtitling into Arabic is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) since it is used in the media and educational institutions in the Arab World. According to Gamal (2012, p. 496), the spoken colloquial variety of Arabic is not accepted in translation and/or interpretation and is normally substituted by "the more reserved and respected classical variety of Arabic." Moreover, Mazid (2006) finds a "harmony between modern Standard Arabic (SA) and the written mode of subtitles." (p. 84).

Restrictive as it may appear, this shift in register was exploited as a strategy to attenuate the obscenity of certain swearwords when subtitling into Arabic. For instance, the swearword 'bitch' was rendered into [عاهرة] (Lit. salacious), 'assholes' into [سفلة] (Lit mean), 'suckers' into [أغبياء] (Lit. fools), 'motherfucker' into [وغد، سافل] (Lit. scoundrel, raffish), 'fuck' into [ضاجع] (Lit. lie with), and 'crap' into [براز] (Lit. excrement), which are standard Arabic lexemes employed to remove much of the vulgar overtones of their counterparts in the original text. To further illustrate this phenomenon, two of the aforementioned instances are discussed below:

Example 4

- Just get us some more fucking drinks.          فقط أجلبي لنا المزيد من الشراب اللعين
- Get us some drinks, <u>bitch</u>!          اجلب بعض الشارب أيتها العاهرة
(Lit. Just bring for us some additional damned drink.)

(Bring some drink, you salacious.)

In example 4, the word 'bitch' in the source text could have been translated into the colloquial and more informal yet very close equivalent in Arabic namely the word [قحبة] (Lit. prostitute). Indeed, this word has the same function in informal situations in Arabic as that of the word 'bitch' in English. Nevertheless, the shift in register from the spoken to the written mode necessitated opting for the word [عاهرة] (Lit. salacious) as a MSA word to assist in attenuating obscenity. This strategy is further illustrated by example 5.

Example 5

A big <u>fucking</u> steaming <u>crap</u>.                                          كمية براز كبيرة جدا

وبرائحة كريهة جدا

(Lit. A very huge amount of excrement with very bad smell.)

In example 5, the English word 'crap' was rendered into [براز] (Lit. excrement,) in the subtitles. The word [براز] is a medical word mainly used in situations whereby a stool test is required for the diagnosis of certain pathogens. Again, the shift to the written mode necessitated the use of the MSA word [براز] which is less obscene in comparison with other informal words such as [khara] (Lit. faeces, waste).

Archaic words are also used for the same purpose whereby swearwords such as 'slut' is rendered into [باغية] (Lit. punk), 'wine' into [نبيذ] (Lit. date or currant juice not necessarily intoxicating). Such words originated from classical Arabic, which is alien to a big population of the Arab community who may not understand their connotations. Therefore, their employment represents a translation strategy to water down the obscenity of swearwords to the viewers.

**Use of euphemistic expressions**

Euphemism was another strategy used by the amateur subtitler to attenuate the obscenity of swearwords. Euphemism refers to cases whereby a vulgar or dysphemistic word is replaced by another preferable one to avoid losing face (Thawabteh, 2012). Examples of euphemism in the corpus included replacing a direct and dysphemistic word by a more euphemized one such as rendering 'fuck' into [يمارس الجنس] (Lit. practice sex), 'pain in the ass' into [مزعج] (Lit. annoying), 'queers' [غريب الاطوار] (Lit. abnormal), 'do not give a fuck' into [لا ابالي] (Lit. do not care) and 'unfucked' into [تفادي هذا] (Lit. avoid this). Consider the following example:

Example 6

You know, I know that                                          أعرف بأن الأمر كان <u>مزعجا</u>

this is a big <u>pain in the ass</u>.                                          وأن الأمر برمته كان خاطئا

(Lit. I know that the matter was annoying.)

In example 6, the English idiomatic swearing expression 'pain in the ass' was euphemized in the subtitles through the use of a diluting non-swearing word [مزعجا] (Lit. annoying) which falls short of conveying the deep degree of anger and frustration expressed in the source text. Although the word [مزعج] can be used to express some uncomfortable psychological states particularly that of annoyance, all traces of obscenity in the source text particularly that triggered by the use of the word 'ass' were erased in the Arabic subtitles.

*Generalization and linguistic substitution*

The amateur subtitler also exploited generalization and linguistic substitution to attenuate the obscenity of swearwords. When it comes to generalization, the subtitler replaced a more specific swearword in the source text with a more general less offensive one in the subtitles. For

instance, the word 'suck cock' was skewed into the general expression [تفعل شيئا قذرا] (Lit. do something dirty), 'weed' into [اعشاب] (Lit. herbs) and 'shit smell' into [رائحة] (Lit. smell). A discussion of one of these examples will make the point clear.

Example 7

| | |
|---|---|
| Yeah, yeah. Just make sure | حسنا حسنا تأكد من زوال الرائحة من على السجاد |
| you get the shit smell | سافل |
| out of the carpet, bitch! | |

(Lit. Ok, ok, make sure to remove the smell from the carpet, mean.)

In example 7, the swearword 'shit' in the source text, which specifies the source of the smell and describes it, was omitted and the reference was generalized to just a 'smell' (hyponym) in the target text. Of course the intent was to remove much of the obscenity stemming from the use of the word 'shit', but the effect coming from the image when a real 'excrement' can be seen by the audiences is of less help to the subtitler. The same intent of attenuating obscenity has prevented the subtitler form using the adjectival [كريهة] (Lit. bad, stink) as a compromise that coheres with the word [رائحة].

As for linguistic substitution, the subtitler attempted to substitute the direct mention of the swearword by whatever linguistic (deictic) elements as deemed suitable in the context of situation. For example, 'fuck' was sometimes replaced by the word [هذا] (Lit. this) and 'shit' by words like [شيء، هنا، امور، ذلك] (Lit. thing, here, matters, this). Consider example 8 below.

Example 8

| | |
|---|---|
| - Mazursky, right? | مازروسكي أليس كذلك ؟ |
| - Can you believe that shit? | هل تصدق ذلك ؟ |
| | (Lit. Mazursky, isn't it?) |
| | (Do you believe this?) |

Example (8) illustrates the substitution of the swearword 'shit' in the source text with the demonstrative 'this' in the target text as a strategy to tone down obscenity.

### *Ambiguous expressions*

The use of ambiguous expressions represents another translation strategy which the amateur subtitler exploited to attenuate the obscenity of certain swearwords. Ambiguity in this context refers to the act of replacing a clear and direct swearword in the source text by a more indeterminate and vague word that has nothing to do with the expression of swearing in the target text. For example, the swearword 'fag' used in the movie dialogue was replaced by the ambiguous word [كحيح] (Lit. subdued) as a translation equivalent in the Arabic subtitles resulting in a rendition that is meaningless to the majority of the audiences. Other instances which display ambiguity include the swearing expression 'smack shit out' in the source text which was replaced by the phrase [اركل خارجا] (Lit. kick outside). Consider the following example:

Example 9

| | |
|---|---|
| Don't make me wonder about you, kid. You sound | أنت تجعلني أتعجب منك يا فتى |
| like half a fucking fag. | يبدو لي صوتك كحيح تبا |
| | (Lit. You make me wonder about you, young |
| boy!) | |
| | (It seems to me that your voice is subdued, damn.) |

In example 9, the swearword 'fag' in the source text was replaced by the word 'كحيح' [subdued] in the subtitles, which might not make sense to the majority of young Arab movie fans. The subtitler seemed to have confused the meaning of the word 'sound' in this example. However, because s/he intended to disguise the obscenity of the word 'fag', s/he did his/her best to exploit this equivocation by making the word 'sound' cohere with the word 'كحيح'.

**Conclusion**

The present study has attempted to identify the attenuating strategies adopted by Arab amateur subtitlers when handling swearwords in English movies. Contrary to what is hypothesized about amateur subtitlers as being source text oriented, the results of analysis highlighted a tendency towards mitigating the obscenity of expressions and words that cause offense. This tendency reflects a target-culture oriented approach whereby subtitlers feel inclined towards active norms in the target culture to abide by the audiences' expectations. It was apparent that the cultural norms were more influential than the technical constraints characteristic of subtitling in determining the adoption of the translation strategy.

The adopted attenuating strategies ranged from complete elimination of the swearword whereby the subtitler did not provide an equivalent in the target text to the use of ambiguous expressions that sometimes yielded an awkward type of translation. In between these two extremes, the amateur subtitler employed changes in semantic field, register shift and archaic words, euphemism and generalization and substitution. It can be argued that the subtitler relied on certain factors to compensate for the loss in translation emanating from adopting these 'corruption' strategies (Nornes, 1999). The first is the polysemiotic nature of the film texture whereby other audio, visual and nonverbal codes can be utilized to assist the audience in comprehending the storyline of the movie. The second is the familiarity of the target audience with a great deal of English swearwords due to the popularity of such words. However, such factors did not always back up the subtitlers whose main intent was to mitigate the obscenity of swearwords to Arab audiences. Nevertheless, whether other connotative nuances of meaning characteristic of the use of swearwords were passed over to the target audience or were adversely affected by the attenuating strategies is an issue that deserves further investigation. Another issue that deserves investigation is a comparison with professional subtitling of swearwords into Arabic.

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