

English-Arabic Subtitling: A Relevance-Theoretic Approach

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Abstract

Several scholars have recently decried the dearth of research on Arabic audiovisual translation, including subtitling, calling for the exploration of appropriate theoretical frameworks that could support Arab translators in their profession. To contribute to filling in this gap, the paper will explore the usefulness of Gutt's (1991/2014) relevance-theoretic approach for English-Arabic film subtitling. The paper argues that given the "prescriptivism" in film subtitling of only translating what is deemed most relevant to the comprehension of the film dialogue, a relevance-theoretic approach best provides practitioners with a framework for making the appropriate decisions.

Keywords: *Subtitling, Arabic audiovisual translation, relevance theory, reduction*

Introduction

In 2017, a study commissioned by the MESA Europe Content Localization Council concluded that over-the-top services, such as Hulu, Amazon Prime and Netflix, were witnessing such a great boom that the volume of audiovisual translation, mainly subtitling, would exceed two billion dollars per year by 2020, including in the Middle East (Green 2018). Considering the dramatic surge in Netflix subscribers from all over the world in the first quarter of 2020 ('Netflix' 2020), this trend is set to spike even higher over the next few years, including in the Arab World. Such growing market of audiovisual translation in this region, however, has not been adequately reflected in research in Arab countries. Gamal (2019: 202), for instance, points out that despite existing research on both translation policy and translation practice in the Arab world, such research has fallen short of creating "a school of thought in Arabic translation with a developed philosophy, defined theoretical frameworks or a designed pedagogy." This, coupled with lack of interest and investment by schools and university departments of translation in the Arab world, has resulted in a dearth of research on Arabic AVT (2018).

In response to this concern, the present paper explores one specific mode of audiovisual translation (AVT), namely subtitling, from English into Arabic. Applying Gutt's (2014) relevance-theoretic approach to the translation of a clip from the British film *Chicken Run* (Lord & Park 2000) into Arabic, the paper's objective is twofold. It aims to give insight into the main difficulties encountered in subtitling movies from English into Arabic, two linguistically and culturally remote languages. It also aims to highlight the usefulness of relevance theory as a tool for decision-making in subtitling and, therefore, for analysing and evaluating subtitles. The paper will thus focus on the two main difficulties generally associated with this mode of translation, namely the need for reduction, resulting mainly from the spatial and temporal constraints under which this translational mode is performed (Kovačič 1994; Matielo et al. 2015), and culture-specific elements. It argues that given the stringent conditions under which subtitling is practiced, and which impose the "prescriptivism" of only translating what is deemed most relevant to the comprehension of the film dialogue, a relevance-theoretic approach best provides practitioners with a framework for making the appropriate decisions.

Arabic audiovisual translation: an overview

Audiovisual translation (AVT) was born out of the need for films to conquer new linguistic markets, which locates the birth of this mode of translation in the beginning of the twentieth century. While it was the big screen that brought about AVT, it was the extraordinary advances in communication technologies, especially the Internet, video-streaming and portable players, that gave AVT momentum and significantly increased the need for it. According to Gambier (2013: 53), these technological advances have had several implications for AVT. On the one hand, they offer audiences a wider range of more specialized and personalized services, such as Pay TV and thematic TV channels, thus marking a shift from “broadcasting to narrowcasting” and creating new audiences with pronouncedly divergent needs and expectations. On the other hand, and because of the globalizing effect of the Internet and the ever-increasing amount of content finding its way through video streaming sites to a global audience, there is at once an increase in “fansubs” and “fandubs,” online fan communities that translate AV content, and a strong need for TV broadcasters and film distributors to ensure their content reaches the wider audience before these fans download it and subtitle/dub it (54). Finally, automation is increasingly digitizing the profession and deeply changing the practice.

As a result of this significant increase in the demand for AVT, and of the deep changes this industry has undergone over the past couple of decades, AVT developed so quickly and so deeply from a “virgin area of research” as Delabastita (1989: 202) described it not that long ago, into what many scholars have started to consider as a discipline in its own right (see, for instance, Pérez González 2014). The varied terminology that has been used over the years to describe and discuss AVT, from the restrictive “film translation” and “screen translation” to the broader “versioning” and “multimedia translation,” highlights not only the impact of technological developments on the practice but also what Gambier (2013: 46) aptly describes as “the vitality of the research domain and the diversity of practices.”

The impact of technological developments, especially Internet penetration, the advent of social media platforms and the proliferation of portable players, coupled with political developments in the region, resulted in a similar diversity of AVT practices in the Arab world, albeit to a lesser extent due to high illiteracy rates. AVT, especially subtitling, is used as much for information and entertainment (see, for instance, Eldalees, Al-Adwan & Yahiaoui, 2017 on fansubbing), as for activism (cf. Baker 2016). This diversity of practices, however, has not been matched by a vitality of research. In his detailed and comprehensive account of the situation of audiovisual translation in the Arab World, Gamal (2019: 208) decries what he sees as a “dearth of publications on the subject despite the importance of language transfer on screen, particularly as screens dominate the way millions in the Arab World live, study, work, communicate socially and organize political opposition.” While he acknowledges that “some academics at Arab universities have [...] responded to the noticeable emergence of audiovisual translation studies,” he points out that this response remains minimal and reflects nothing more than a “passing academic interest.”

Gamal (2019: 209) argues that such lack of engagement with AVT studies on the part of Arab scholars is “directly linked to the absence of adequate theoretical frameworks.” Without such frameworks, Arabic AVT will not “grow in its own environment to be professionally relevant and socially responsible.” Echoing Gamal, Khuddro (2018: 20) contends that Arabic AVT is “still a relatively young field in translation studies,” a field that will only expand with more research undergirded by the main theories and approaches to

translation, including the polysystems theory, the functional approaches, critical discourse analysis and relevance theory.

This lack of scholarly engagement and the need for research anchored in sound theoretical frameworks affect not only dubbing—a practice that only came into prominence and started garnering more audience acceptance in the Arab world at the turn of the twenty-first century with the dubbing of Turkish drama (Gamal 2019)—but also subtitling, a practice that “has been established as the preferred mode of film translation” ever since the arrival of the talking cinema to the Arab world (Gamal 2008: 8). More importantly, a quick review of the most recent research on Arabic subtitling gives credence to Khuddro’s concerns above, as it reveals that very few studies have been conducted from within the framework of the main translation theories and approaches. One specific theoretic approach that is conspicuously absent is the relevance-theoretic approach. Thus, Hussain and Khuddro (2016a) develop a model based on de Beaugrande and Dressler’s approach to help subtitlers with their decision-making process, while Al Harthi (2016) grapples with humour in subtitling by drawing on the general theory of verbal humour. As to Hussain and Khuddro (2016b), they address issues associated with AVT, with specific focus on linguistic or factual errors that might exist in the audiovisual source text (ST) and the type of “mediation” necessary to deal with such errors. They fall short, however, of grounding their study in any theoretical framework.

The discussion below is aimed precisely at addressing the gaps in literature identified above, by exploring the usefulness of Gutt’s relevance-theoretic approach to English-Arabic subtitling.

Interlingual subtitling: a more complex translation form

Gottlieb (2012: 37) defines subtitling as a “diamesic translation in polysemiotic media [...] *in the form of one or more lines of written text presented on the screen in sync with the original verbal content*” (emphasis in the original). It is, indeed, diamesic insofar as it involves transfer not only from one language to another, but also from one mode to another, i.e. from speech to writing. But it is Gottlieb’s (1992: 162) earlier definition that best brings out the complexity of this form of translation: he defined it as an “additive, immediate, synchronous and polymedial” translation. It is additive because instead of replacing the original message, it adds a new verbal visual element to the visual channel of the film, thus creating a tension between what is shown on the screen and the information contained in the subtitle. Subtitles are immediate since viewers cannot control them or re-read previous subtitles. They are also synchronous in that they are presented simultaneously with the original film and dialogue, which calls for synchronization with both the image and the sound. Finally, they are polymedial since they are part of the original message of the film, conveyed through other parallel channels, namely the non-verbal visual and the verbal and non-verbal sound channels. Understanding how these channels, primarily the verbal sound one, i.e. dialogue, contribute to the meaning of the film is a first step towards producing felicitous subtitles.

In his revisited audience design model, Bell (2001) justly maintains that speakers design their speech to accommodate their addressees. Since Bell’s model has been conceived based on observations of shifts in news language style in broadcast media, it can account for style shifts in mass communication, in general. Applied to film dialogue, this framework implies that screenwriters design characters’ speech in such a way as to cater not so much to the interlocutors on screen as to the target audience. Lending credence to this claim in her seminal

book-length study *Overhearing Film Dialogue*, Kozloff (2000: 15-18) asserts that film dialogue, as an integral part of the narrative, “has been purposely designed for the viewers to overhear”, and that all the features of spontaneous speech it contains are deliberate and have an objective in the plot. This implies that translators have to account for every utterance in the dialogue by giving “due respect to the original creator of the text and what he/she intended to convey, even if only through inference or implicature” (Taylor 2000: 7).

Accordingly, subtitling is a translation where “the speech act is in focus; verbal intentions [...] are more important than atomized lexical elements” (Gottlieb 1994a: 104). However, as a “diasemiotic translation” (Baker 2003: 245), subtitling makes the task of getting all the “intentions” of screenwriters and speakers on screen across the boundaries of language and mode, a form of tightrope walking. Indeed, subtitles are limited both in time and space by the space on screen, the audience’s reading speed, the size of the original utterance, the pace of the dialogue and the specificities of the source and target languages (De Linde & Kay 2016: 6). Subtitles are further constrained by their “additive” feature. Instead of replacing the message, they are superimposed on the verbal visual channel of the film, becoming thus part of the whole message conveyed through four different channels, namely the verbal and non-verbal auditory channels and the verbal and non-verbal visual channels. This necessarily creates a tension between the image and sound on screen, on the one hand, and the subtitle, on the other. It also results in what Gottlieb (1997: 219) identified as an “intersemiotic feedback” from the visual and sound track, which can be positive at times in that it may include redundant elements that make reduction easy, and negative, at other times, in that it may further constrain the margin of manoeuvre left to the translator. Finally, the additive nature of subtitles brings about what Törnqvist (1995: 49) calls the “gossiping effect.” Indeed, in subtitling, the source text is constantly and immediately available to the audience alongside the target text, i.e. the subtitles. The latter are therefore open to the scrutiny of those viewers with knowledge of the source language, thus putting additional strain on the translator.

Gutt’s relevance-theoretic approach

These constraints become even tighter in the subtitling of films, a form of translation that has been considered by many translation scholars as a subfield within the larger field of literary translation (cf. Snell-Hornby 1995). Indeed, like literary translation, (interlingual) film subtitling requires the translator to move not only from one language to another, but also from one cultural and ideological system to another. The translator is thus constantly engaged in a process of negotiation and balance, and constantly making decisions, not only on how to translate and get cultural and intertextual references across within a very limited physical space, but also on what to translate, how to deal with culture-specific references that need background information for easy processing, and what to leave out precisely to allow for any necessary additions, all without disrupting the viewing experience. Indeed, any overt translation or any translation that requires too much processing against a moving image and source text will interrupt the suspension of disbelief so very necessary for the success of a film and the effectiveness of film dialogue. This specificity of (film) subtitling imposes on the translator what Fawcett (1996: 78) rightly described as “the prescriptivism of translating only what is most relevant.” In other words, in the decision-making process that subtitling is, the overriding value is relevance. One theoretical approach that can both provide an account for this specific

translational mode where relevance is crucial, and help practitioners with their decision-making is the relevance-theoretic approach as conceived by Gutt (1991/2014).

In his *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context* (1991/2014), Gutt proposes what he calls a “unified account of translation,” based on Sperber and Wilson’s (1986) Relevance Theory (RT). Central to the latter is the principle of optimal relevance whereby speakers have a communicative intention and what they communicate is expected to be optimally relevant to hearers. Utterances are relevant in a given context to the extent that they have large contextual effects in that context, and that these effects can be recovered with small processing effort (125). In relevance-theoretic terms, the context is “a subset of the hearer’s assumptions about the world” (Sperber & Wilson 1986: 15). Also central to RT is the distinction between descriptive and interpretive use of language. A speaker is said to use language descriptively when his/her utterance is (understood as) a true representation of what he/she believes to be true. By contrast, a speaker is said to use language interpretively when his/her utterance is a representation of what someone else said, thought or presented as true.

Drawing on these notions, Gutt (2014: 107) maintains that translation is an instance of interlingual interpretive use where the target text is presumed to interpretively resemble the original in “respects that make it adequately relevant to the receptor language audience”. This can only happen if the translation provides “adequate contextual effects” and conveys “the intended interpretation without putting the audience to unnecessary processing effort” (107). According to Gutt, this relevance-theoretic approach to translation is helpful not only for translation theorists, but also for translators in that it provides a clear insight into the relationship that obtains between the original and its translation (107). Giving this claim credence, Smith (2002: 115) asserts that “empowering translators to make right decisions is Gutt’s primary contribution.” I would add that Gutt’s conceptualization of this relationship transcends traditional understandings of fidelity and equivalence by shifting the focus away from the original to the product of the translation and its target context. It also transcends restrictive binary approaches, such as the one proposed by Venuti (1995 and 1998), for instance, by bringing out the decisive role of context in decision-making.

Like all other theoretical approaches to translation, Gutt’s received its share of criticism. Talking about Gutt’s relevance-theoretic approach as it specifically relates to film translation, Fawcett (1996), for instance, takes Gutt to task for a few inconsistencies. Indeed, Gutt (2014: 129) distinguishes between “translations where the translator is free to elaborate or summarize”, which he terms “indirect” translations, and those translations where the translator “has to somehow stick to explicit contents of the original,” and which he deems “proper.” This distinction would put film translation outside the scope of translation “proper” for which Gutt proposes his relevance-theoretic approach, since film translation often requires considerable summarization or reduction. Fawcett (1996: 79), however, dismisses this distinction as “ironical” insofar as relevance theory “very clearly applies” to film translation, too. More importantly, Gutt (1991/2014: 122) asserts that “the principle of relevance can also be seen behind guidelines given for oral translation (simultaneous interpretation).” If this is the case, Fawcett (1996: 79) rightly points out, then Gutt’s theoretical approach “must clearly apply to film translation, since what is said of interpreting is, if anything, even more true of film with its multiple semiotic channels” (Fawcett 1996: 79). In fact, Fawcett aptly argues that the wide range of adaptations necessary in such “indirect translations” as film translation are all dictated by the need to “offer adequate contextual effects,” which is one of the main principles of Gutt’s approach (79).

Many of the key premises underpinning Gutt's approach can indeed soundly account for subtitling. For instance, the notion of similar contextual effects seems to comply with Gottlieb's (1994a: 256) contention that the ideal in subtitling "would be achieving the same effect on the audience as the one the original audience experienced". Likewise, the notion of processing effort is particularly valid in subtitling where translation is determined by "the balance between the effort required by the viewer to process an item, and its relevance for understanding the film narrative" (Díaz-Cintas and Remael 2014: 113). As a result, several scholars have, over the years, brought to the fore the usefulness of relevance theory to AVT. Thus, Chaume (2008: 134) argues that "[a]mplification and reduction techniques must be monitored by relevance theory (Gutt 1991/2014) and by conventions to which different audiovisual genres are subject in each culture and epoch." Likewise, and speaking more specifically about subtitling, Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2014: 148) maintain that the approach is

quite useful for analyzing and explaining the logic of subtitling omissions, which cannot simply be put down to linguistic factors. It is the balance between the effort required by the viewer to process an item, and its relevance for the understanding of the film narrative that determines whether or not it is to be included in the translation.

Subtitling *Chicken Run*

The researcher has thus chosen a relevance-theoretic approach to inform the subtitling into Arabic of a 5-minute clip (see appendix) from the British film *Chicken Run* (Lord & Park: 2000). The film is very interesting in that it mixes three genres, namely thriller, action and romance, and is a claymation cartoon. However, *Chicken Run* can fit within a general and broader genre, i.e. the family film since it is "a treat for adults and children alike" (Hawkes 2015). It tells the story of chickens trapped in a poultry farm, as they fight for their freedom. They believe they found help in the character of a rooster, named Rocky, who crash-lands in the farm and is, in all appearances, a flying rooster. Besides, characters' personalities in *Chicken Run* and their relationships are central to the plot. Consequently, the dialogue is full of interpersonal elements and is teeming with humorous utterances and culture-specific references, including allusions to WWII and to other films. Because it is drawing on the action film, the pace of the dialogue can get very fast.

All these features are bound to impinge on the process of subtitling the film. The fast pace, for instance, will necessarily call for substantial reductions, for two main reasons. First, the audience includes very young viewers whose reading pace is not fast. Second, subtitling imposes great spatial limitations on the number of characters allowed on the screen. Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2014) maintain that the number of characters per line of subtitle on screen varies across alphabets, and that while the maximum is 37 characters for English, it ranges from 34 to 36 characters per line in the case of Arabic (85). Al-Junaydi (2012), however, finds issue with such restrictions for Arabic subtitling. Although she (14) concedes that, in practice, there are no norms governing the maximum number of characters per line in Arabic subtitling, with the number varying from as few characters as 26 to as many as 62, she (15) rightly argues that since Arabic texts are generally "more condensed than those in English," then there is no valid reason for Arabic subtitling to be restricted to less than the 37-character limit allowed for English subtitling. It is this limit that will be observed in the present study, which will necessarily call for significant reductions.

On the other hand, the film is anchored in the Anglo-American culture, so its subtitling for a culturally remote audience, namely an Arab audience lacking the necessary background to understand much of the culture-specific references in the movie, presents the subtitler with what Leppihalme (1997: 4) has famously dubbed “culture bumps” that have to be overcome.

Reduction in subtitling

As stated above, reductions constitute a typical feature of subtitling. In fact, according to Antonini (2005: 2013), transfer of a text from speech mode to writing mode reduces it by 40% to 75%. Gottlieb (1992: 166) distinguishes between three types of reduction: a) condensation, which is the concise reformulation of the source text; b) decimation, which is the rendition of the source text through “abridged expression, reduced content”; and c) deletion, which involves the complete omission of verbal content. As to Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2014: 164), they distinguish between two broad types of reduction in subtitling, namely partial and total reductions. Partial reduction would correspond to (a) above, as it is, according to Díaz-Cintas and Remael, achieved through a concise reformulation of the source text. Total reduction would correspond to (c), as it entails the complete elimination of what is deemed of little or no relevance to the comprehension of the source text. They point out, however, that more often than not, and especially in the case of fast speech, subtitling involves the two types of reduction, insofar as an utterance could be “deleted, or reformulated more concisely, or both” in its rendition (147). This would correspond to (b) above, since decimation, according to Gottlieb (1992: 166), is often resorted to when subtitling “fast speech of some importance”.

According to the above, the subtitling into Arabic of the clip under study necessarily involved many reductions of different types. The first important instance is 1(a), a long utterance, spoken in a fast pace, thus calling for condensation in its rendering in Arabic.

1(a) Mac: ... and sprained the interior tendon connecting your radius to your humerus, I gave her a wee bit of a tweak, Jimmy, and wrapped it up.

والتوى وتر مرفقك
فقت بتقويمه يا عزيزي.

[and the tendon of your elbow got contorted, so I treated it, my dear]

1(b) Rocky: Was that English?

ماذا قالت؟

[What did she say?]

1(c) Ginger: She said you sprained your wing. She fixed it.

قالت إن جناحك التوى فعالجته.

[She said you sprained your wing so she fixed it]

Utterance 1(a) is a case of idiosyncratic speech. It contains overdetailed information and is unusually fast, which makes it rather confusing to a hearer who is not familiar with the speaker. It also contains an explicature, ‘an explicitly communicated assumption’ (Sperber & Wilson 1986: 182), namely that Mac ‘fixed’ Rocky’s sprained wing, and several implicatures, i.e. implicitly communicated assumptions (182), about the character of Mac. These include that she is Scottish (the accent), that she is the learned mind of the hen-house (her medical know-

how), and that she wants Rocky to appreciate her by reducing the social distance between them (the use of informal language in ‘wee bit’, and of the address form ‘Jimmy’¹). All these elements combined make the whole exchange optimally relevant in that the ratio of cost—in terms of processing efforts—to benefit, in terms of contextual effects, is optimal.

For the translation of this exchange, and especially of 1(a), to be relevant, it has to interpretively resemble the source text and maintain the same cost-benefit ratio. However, to transfer all the linguistic and aural clues contained in 1(a) across language and culture barriers and from the spoken to the written mode, is impossible. Schwartz (2002) argues that, in such cases, the translator has to remedy the loss by retaining “as many features as possible” of the idiosyncratic speech. What complicates the reduction in this case is that the source text itself includes a reduction and, indeed, an intralingual translation of 1(a) in 1(c) in that the latter is a condensed and simplified reformulation of 1(a), a reformulation that flattens the character’s (Mac) speech.

In relevance-theoretic terms, the suggested translation of 1(a) thus brought out those features that make for optimal relevance in this particular context on the basis of the translator’s assumption of what is relevant to the audience. It allowed the latter to have access to the explicature as well as to two of the implicatures, namely Mac’s scientific expertise, through the use of the medical jargon, and her eagerness to be appreciated by Rocky, through the use of “يا عزيزي”, ‘my dear’. The translation of the utterance also compensated for the loss of the idiosyncratic element of Mac’s speech, namely speed, with the use of consonance, through the repetition of the consonants “و”, “قـ” and “ف”, and assonance, through the repetition of the vowel sound [a]. Indeed, repetition of sounds is known to twist tongues (cf. Nikolic & Bakaric 2002), and is, therefore, as confusing as fast speech. Such rendition in Arabic of 1(a) allowed for a more literal translation of the paraphrase in 1(c), a translation that does not repeat any of the words used in the translation of 1(a). Such repetition would have indeed reduced the relevance of the whole exchange, since it would have required large processing efforts for few contextual effects, on the part of a target text audience trying to make sense of why Rocky needed Ginger’s paraphrase in the first place.

Nevertheless, the subtitle lost both the elements of the Scottish accent and slang. Schwartz (2002) asserts that some elements in the spoken language are necessarily lost in subtitling, including regional accents. As to slang, its use is constrained both by the nature of the Arabic language and by the approach adopted. Arabs use different dialects in their everyday speech. As a consequence, audiovisual translation of foreign programs is done in Standard Arabic which is understood by them all regardless of their vernacular, but which does not lend itself to colloquialism (Maluf 2004). Accordingly, to reproduce the regional accent in this clip by one specific dialect would not be optimally relevant for those who do not speak the same dialect since the recovery of the contextual implications in the use of such a dialect would demand large processing efforts from some viewers and may not be possible by others.

2(c) is the second significant case of reduction, more specifically decimation, in the subtitling of this clip:

2(a) Ginger (pointing at the poster): This is our way out of here.

هذا هو سبيلنا للنجاة من هنا!

[This is our way out of here]

¹ Slang, generic names and terms of address are in-group identity markers used under the super-strategy of “positive politeness” (Brown and Levinson 1978: 106-112), whereby the speaker claims common ground with the addressee to gain appreciation and approval (106).

2(b) Baps: We'll make posters?!
سنصنع ملصقات؟!
[We'll make posters?!]

2(c) Ginger: What's on the poster, Baps, what's on the poster. We'll fly out.
لا، بل سنطير خارجا كصاحب الصورة
[No, we will rather fly out like the rooster in the poster]

The narration in this exchange makes use of what Chaume (2004) terms 'semiotic cohesion'. In order for viewers to make complete sense of 2(c), they have to draw not only on the verbal text uttered by the character, but also on the visual elements on the screen, specifically the poster that Ginger found when Rocky crash-landed in the farm. Indeed, the poster features a picture of a rooster with a cap, and a text saying "Rocky, the Flying Rooster." A literal translation would thus make little sense to the target audience since "what is on the poster" may not be readily accessible to those in the audience who do not read and speak English. Besides, although the linguistic content of the poster backs up the utterance, as an element of the visual channel of the clip, it cannot be subtitled since a dialogue is taking place at the same moment the poster is displayed. Consequently, for the subtitle to be a relevant translation of utterance 2(c), it has to interpretively resemble the whole message that 2(c) conveys by reproducing the utterance's propositional content, the interpersonal element of persuasiveness entailed in the repetition, and the linguistic content of the poster. At the same time, the subtitle has to be of a reduced size.

Accordingly, the translation of 2(c) combined both paraphrase and deletion. The paraphrase replaced the implicature in the original by an explicature, as it made explicit what is on the poster; rendered the interpersonal element of emphasis and persuasiveness through the use of the exclamation "لا", no, for negation, together with the conjunction "بل", which means "rather" and is used in Arabic to negate a preceding statement, in this case "we will make posters" and affirm a new one, in this case "we will fly out". On the other hand, the name 'Baps' was deleted. This deletion can be accounted for in terms of the approach adopted. Unlike the address form "Jimmy" above, the only function of this vocative is to enhance the emotive effect of the utterance. This effect is already relayed by the intonation in Ginger's voice. Besides, the visual feedback on the screen already makes it clear that Ginger is addressing Baps. This element has, therefore, no significant contextual effects insofar as it does not change any contextual assumptions.

Another utterance in the source text that called for reduction in the process of subtitling is 3(c), below:

3(a) Ginger: Erm, Mr. Rhodes, is this you?
هل هذا أنت، سيد رودز؟
[is this you, Mr. Rhodes?]

3(b) Rocky: Er, who wants to know?
ولماذا تسألين؟
[and why are you asking?]

3(c) Ginger: A group of rather desperate chickens. If it is you,

then you might be the answer to our prayers.

إذا كان هذا أنت، فقد يكون
الله استجاب لدعواتنا اليائسة

[if this is you, then maybe]

[God has answered our desperate prayers]

In this exchange, we have a case of evasion through hedging. Fraser (2010: 27) defines evasion in language as an instance where “the information you receive from the speaker fails to meet your expectation.” Drawing on Partington (2003), he (2010: 28) further maintains that “challenging the questioner or the source” through such hedges as the question “who wants to know?” in answer to another question, is one of the many ways evasion is realized in language (28). In the case of the exchange above, Rocky is clearly evading Ginger’s question by challenging her and the other chickens asking him if he could fly. Utterance 3(c), i.e. Ginger’s answer, addresses both the illocutionary force of Rocky’s utterance 3(b), which is a request of information, and its perlocutionary effect, i.e. that Rocky’s question is an attempt to evade giving an answer that meets Ginger’s expectations.

For the translation of this exchange to interpretively resemble the source text, all while maintaining the cost/benefit ratio necessary for optimal relevance, it has to recover both the illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect of 3(b). This was done through the Arabic question “ولماذا تسألين؟”, “why are you asking?”. Changing the propositional content of 3(b) in the process of subtitling allowed for the reduction necessary in the subtitling of 3(c). Indeed, the translation of the latter called for both deletion and paraphrase because of the spatial restrictions. Since the part of this utterance that addresses the illocutionary force of 3(b) is less relevant to the comprehension of the exchange, especially that Rocky and the audience already know who is asking the question, it was the one that was deemed disposable and was, therefore, deleted. This deletion was made possible and unnoticeable by the change in the propositional content of 3(b). The second part of the utterance, which is the most relevant one to the comprehension of the plot, was paraphrased in such a way as to 1) reproduce the propositional meaning of the original utterance, and 2) compensate for the loss of meaning incurred from the deletion of the first part of the utterance through the use of the adjective “يائسة”, i.e. desperate, to recover the idea that these chickens are so desperate for help.

Culture-bound problems in subtitling

It is noteworthy that the media-specific constraints of subtitling that impose reduction equally magnify the difficulty of culture-bound problems encountered in all types of interlingual communication. These physical constraints deprive translators of such devices used in translation proper as footnotes and the translator notes (Gottlieb, 1994b: 102). The translator has, thus, to find a rendition that offers the audience a similar balance of contextual effects and mental effort in a different cognitive environment and within the space and time available. The subtitling of the present clip presents a number of culture-bound problems. Utterance 4 is a case in point.

(4) Fowler: and he is a yank!

ثم إنه من رعاة البقر.

[And he is a cowboy]

The literal equivalent of the word “Yank” in Arabic is "أمريكي", meaning “American”. But if the propositional equivalent of “Yank” is, indeed, “American”, the word has negative connotations as it is usually used derogatorily by non-Americans to designate Americans. Besides, the fact that Fowler, an old rooster who served in the Royal Air Force, addresses Rocky as a “Yank” is assumed to be meant as a reminder of WWII. It triggers in the mind of the British viewers especially a world of associations and reminds them of the “friendly” invasion of Britain by the brave but arrogant US soldiers². The translation of “Yank” by "أمريكي", i.e. American, would miss all these associations and would not allow the Arab viewers to infer similar contextual implications. More importantly, it would confuse them when they would later on hear Baps asking about Rocky’s country and the surprise of the chickens at hearing him reply “America”.

The translation of the word by “cowboy” resembles the original in respects assumed to be relevant to the target audience and to yield similar cognitive effect without much mental effort. It explicitly refers to an American and implicitly connotes in the mind of the Arab viewer with bravery, power and arrogance. Besides, the visual feedback in this particular case enhances the effect of the translation since while uttering 4, Fowler pointed at the scarf in Rocky’s neck, which looks very much like the scarves worn by cowboys in Western films, with which the Arab audience is only too familiar. This choice finds further justification in Nord’s functionalist belief (2016: 10) that in cases of connotations and implicitness, the translator has to prioritize function(s) of the target text in the target context over preservation of “meaning or sense in spite of different conditions in source and target communicative situation”.

The second example of cultural problems is a combination of allusion and wordplay:

(5) Fowler: Overpaid, oversexed and over here!

كثرة مال وصحة... وقلة حمد

[**Too much** money and health but **little** contentment]

This utterance was used as a jibe at the American soldiers during the WWII (Hogenboom 2012). Because they were paid much more than the British soldiers, they could afford to entertain women more than the British. Accordingly, the use of this expression in the dialogue is clearly intended by the screenwriters as an allusion to WWII.

Allusions are a form of intertextuality aimed at triggering associations in the mind of the audience (Leppihalme 1997: 7-8). Drawing on Gutt’s view, Leppihalme (8) argues that allusions can be seen as a “message or stimulus which the communicator sends, and it is up to the receiver to find the intended referent”. While the Anglo-American viewer is assumed by screenwriters to be able to “find the intended referent”, the average Arab viewer cannot possibly identify the allusion and draw the same inference since there is no shared cognitive environment between him/her and the Anglo-American viewer. It follows that while utterance (5) is optimally relevant, and thus coherent for Anglo-American viewers, its literal translation would fall short in terms of adequate relevance.

Besides, utterance (5) is a case of wordplay based on homophony. Gottlieb (1997: 223) argues that this type of wordplay suffers the most in the process of subtitling, asserting, however, that the loss incurred can be compensated despite the media-related constraints of

² See Reynolds (2000) for an excellent insight into the American-British encounter during the “American Occupation of Britain” in 1942-1945, and the stereotypical perceptions the British had of the American invaders and vice versa.

subtitling. In fact, Delabastita (cited in Schwartz 2002) maintains that wordplays can be reproduced by a rhetoric device that compensates the lost stylistic effect.

Consequently, and to have similar contextual effects which the Arab audience can recover without much processing effort, the translation of utterance (5) reproduced part of the propositional content, avoiding at the same time the overt sexual reference, which the Arab audience would not expect in a family film. It captured the bitter connotation associated with the original and compensated for the stylistic loss by means of antithesis, a rhetoric device common in Arabic.

The translation of utterances (4) and (5) may not reproduce the association with WWII in the mind of the Arab audience. For though average Arab viewers, including adolescents, know about the role of the US in this war, they are not expected to know such culture-bound expressions. Gutt (2014) suggests that it is erroneous to believe that translation can give the target audience access to all the layers of meaning in the original. Besides, the loss at this level does not adversely impair the target audience's understanding of the plot.

Conclusion

While interlingual subtitling shares many commonalities with other types of translation proper, including literary translation, the many physical restrictions under which it is performed do set it distinctly apart. So much apart, in fact, that Díaz-Cintas (2003) has famously dubbed it the “vulnerable translation.” In such translation, often calling for drastic interventions, especially when moving between two completely different cultural systems, the translator has to make sure that none of his/her interventions affect the cohesion and coherence of the dialogue. More important, the translator has to ensure none of these interventions alert the audience to the translational act, an act that is, paradoxically, visually foregrounded in subtitling. With its emphasis on the principle of optimal relevance, and the concept of interpretive resemblance rather than equivalence, Gutt's relevance-theoretic approach provides practitioners with the necessary theoretical framework to deal with such stringent conditions and the “prescriptivism” of relevance they impose on translators. As such, the approach is also of particular relevance to practitioners of Arabic audiovisual translation which Gamal (2007: 85) astutely describes as “an industry without a profession,” precisely because there is still little academic research to support the profession and guide translators.

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In SKASE Journal of Translation and Interpretation [online]. 2022, vol. 15, no. 2 [cit. 2022 12-12]. Available online at http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JTI23/pdf_doc/01.pdf. ISSN 1336-7811.