

Adapting *Ad Hoc* Concepts in Screen Productions

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Abstract

This paper examines how ad hoc concepts are rendered in the English subtitles of colloquial Jordanian Arabic in the Netflix film The Alleys (2021). Ad hoc concepts, shaped through narrowing, broadening, or both, result from pragmatic modifications of lexical items. The study analyses selected concepts and figurative expressions, revealing that many were adapted rather than translated literally to ensure clarity and contextual relevance. Two main types emerge: Those shaped by narrative events and those grounded in Jordanian sociocultural contexts, encompassing figurative and non-figurative language. Subtitlers prioritized conveying culture-specific meanings, reflecting the film's setting in an Amman neighborhood where language use is tightly bound to cultural identity. Literal translation would risk miscomprehension for English viewers; instead, contextually tailored renditions preserved both meaning and nuance, underscoring the subtitler's role in balancing linguistic accuracy with cultural accessibility.

Keywords: Ad hoc concepts, explicatures, relevance theory, subtitling

1. Introduction

The domain of audiovisual translation has experienced notable growth in recent years (Pérez-Escudero 2018; Bogucki 2020; Wang & Daghigh 2024), driven by globalization and the rapid rise of video streaming platforms, which have amplified demand for translated audiovisual content (Ali et al. 2024b).¹ As global audiences consume more translated material, translation techniques have become increasingly critical to ensuring accessibility and comprehension across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Among these methods, subtitling stands out as the most widely adopted and a key driver of recent advancements (Díaz Cintas 2013), enabling access to diverse works for broad audiences (Díaz Cintas & Remael 2014). In the Arab world, subtitling dominates English–Arabic translation (Gamal 2019; Qasim & Yahiaoui 2019), underscoring the need for high-quality translations that convey meaning without imposing excessive cognitive effort on viewers. For subtitles to be effective, they must be clear and comprehensible (Bogucki 2020). One way to enhance clarity is through pragmatic processes that refine the intended message, producing explicatures (Murtisari 2013; Jarrah & Al-Jarrah 2023), interpretations derived from integrating linguistic expressions with contextual clues (Sperber & Wilson 1995; Wilson 2016). Explicatures give audiences the elements needed to infer intended meanings without fully stating them (Carston 2004).

This study focuses on one pragmatic process of generating explicatures: *Ad hoc* concept construction, adjusting the meaning of expressions to align with context (Yus 2006;

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Huang 2014). Such adjustments may narrow or broaden the original meaning, depending on communicative needs. By doing so, subtitlers facilitate explicit interpretation and reduce audience cognitive load. This is particularly relevant when translating figurative language, which is often culture-bound and opaque without adaptation.

Consider the following examples from colloquial Jordanian Arabic:

- (1) هاي البنت حلوة
ha:j ʔilbint ʔilwah
(Lit. ‘This girl is sweet!’)

The adjective *ʔilwah* (‘sweet’) may refer to physical beauty or inner qualities. In a context of admiration for appearance, *the girl is luscious* captures the physical sense. If referring to kindness, *the girl is sweet-hearted* is more appropriate. The choice depends on conversational context and intended attributes.

- (2) البنت قطاعة
ʔilbint qatʔa:ʕah
(Lit. ‘The girl is pliers.’)

Here, *qatʔa:ʕah* literally means ‘pliers’ but figuratively conveys studiousness. A literal translation would confuse English audiences unfamiliar with the metaphor. *The girl is a bookworm* preserves the figurative sense and ensures cultural accessibility.

Such examples illustrate how *ad hoc* constructions adapt meaning to fit context and audience expectations, particularly when figurative or culture-specific expressions are involved. Translating these constructions directly often risks incomprehension; contextually adapted renditions preserve both meaning and cultural considerations.

Studying the use of *ad hoc* concepts in subtitling is linguistically and pragmatically significant. In relevance theory, *ad hoc* concepts arise through contextual processes of lexical adjustment such as narrowing, broadening, or a combination of both (Carston 2002; Sperber & Wilson 2012). These processes illustrate how speakers and listeners derive contextually appropriate meanings that may differ from the conventional sense of a lexical item. For translators, particularly subtitlers, interpreting and conveying such context-dependent meanings can be challenging, especially given the temporal and spatial constraints of subtitles (Díaz Cintas & Remael 2014). Examining how *ad hoc* concepts are translated therefore sheds light on how subtitlers balance fidelity to the source-language meaning with accessibility for the target audience, contributing to both theoretical and applied translation studies (Gutt 2000).

Moreover, analyzing whether subtitlers rely solely on narrative context or also consider sociocultural factors, audience expectations, and genre conventions offers insight into translation decision-making. Pragmatic research (e.g. House 2018; Ali et al. 2024a) shows that meaning is rarely encoded in linguistic form alone; it emerges dynamically through context. In subtitling, this entails cultural negotiation, deciding which aspects of the source concept are most relevant for the target audience (Baker 2018). Studying such decisions reveals implicit norms in translation practice and the extent to which cultural transparency is prioritized over lexical fidelity.

If subtitlers consistently employ strategies like explicitation, domestication, or reformulation, these patterns may reflect broader norms in resolving ambiguity across languages (Venuti 2017). This is increasingly important as global audiences rely on subtitled media, where effective handling of *ad hoc* constructions directly impacts intelligibility and reception.

The study also holds practical value for translator training, offering a framework for best practices in subtitling *ad hoc* concepts. By articulating strategies for managing such constructions, it contributes to improved translation quality and more culturally resonant media.

This article argues that translating *ad hoc* concepts, rather than using direct equivalents, more effectively conveys intended meaning, enhancing translation quality and viewer engagement. Accordingly, it addresses two research questions:

1. To what extent do Arabic–English subtitlers employ *ad hoc* concepts?
2. Do they rely solely on the film’s events or also consider broader contextual factors?

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews relevance theory and explicature, defining *ad hoc* concepts. Section 3 distinguishes concepts from *ad hoc* concepts. Section 4 details methodology, Section 5 presents findings, and Section 6 discusses results. Section 7 concludes with key insights and future research directions.

2. Relevance theory, explicatures, and *ad hoc* concepts

Relevance theory, developed by Sperber & Wilson (1986 [1995]), posits that human cognition is geared toward maximizing relevance, seeking the greatest contextual effect for the least cognitive effort (Yus 2006; Allott & Textor 2012; Huang 2014; Jarrah et al. 2024). An input, whether an utterance or a memory, is relevant when it interacts with a hearer’s existing knowledge to yield meaningful conclusions (Wilson & Sperber 2004; Carston 2004, 2010). In subtitling, if this alignment is lacking, subtitlers must supply contextual cues to facilitate comprehension.

Meaning is conveyed through explicatures, contextually developed explicit content, and implicatures, inferred meanings (Sperber & Wilson 1995; Carston 2002). Explicatures emerge from linguistic forms that require contextual enrichment, refined through pragmatic processes such as disambiguation, reference resolution (Recanati 2004), free enrichment (Ali et al. 2024b), saturation, and *ad hoc* concept construction (Barsalou 1992). These processes ensure that incomplete or ambiguous utterances are interpreted accurately.

Relevance theory thus frames communication as an inferential process in which linguistic expressions are only one component, with context providing the essential scaffolding for meaning. This interaction between language and context underpins effective subtitling, especially when translating culturally and pragmatically complex material.

Consider the following example, which demonstrates how a linguistic form is transformed into an explicature in translation from Jordanian Arabic into English:

- (3) حكته انه راح عليه الموعد
 ḥake:tilloh ʔinno: ra:h ʕale:h ʔilmawʕid
 (Lit. ‘I told him that he missed the submission.’)

When combined with contextual information, this can generate the following explicature: *I told Mohammad that he did not meet the submission deadline for the writing course assignment*. This explicature is derived through several pragmatic processes that help clarify the intended meaning. Reference resolution allows the listener to identify *him* as Mohammad, ensuring the correct referent is understood. Disambiguation plays a role in interpreting the verb *missed* as *failed to meet the deadline* rather than any other possible meaning. Additionally, free enrichment refines the meaning of *submission* by specifying that it refers to a particular deadline. Lastly, free enrichment further clarifies the statement by specifying that the *assignment* in question belongs to the Writing course. Together, these processes contribute to a more precise and contextually appropriate interpretation of the utterance.

As previously highlighted, the formation of *ad hoc* meanings, which serves as the primary focus of this study, involves the contextual adaptation of an idea within its logical framework. Barsalou (1992) argues that expressions within this pragmatic domain do not carry fixed definitions that can be assigned according to strict guidelines. Instead, they convey a broad spectrum of interpretations that shift based on the surrounding context, with specific meanings being selected as necessary to fit different circumstances.

Within relevance theory, lexical meanings may undergo contextual adjustment through processes commonly described as narrowing and broadening. Narrowing occurs when the interpreted meaning of a word becomes more specific than its conventional dictionary sense. For example, the word *drink* may be interpreted as *alcoholic drink* in the sentence *He doesn't drink*. In contrast, broadening occurs when the interpreted meaning becomes more general or extended beyond its conventional sense. For instance, the word *mother* in the sentence *She is a mother to the whole team* extends beyond the literal meaning to describe someone who provides care or support. These processes demonstrate how speakers and listeners construct *ad hoc* concepts, adjusting lexical meaning to fit the communicative context.

3. Concepts versus *ad hoc* concepts

The distinction between concepts and *ad hoc* concepts lies in the stability versus contextual flexibility of meaning (Carston 2013). Concepts are stable mental representations storing encyclopedic and logical information (Wilson & Carston 2007). They act as labels for entities, properties, or activities, with fixed denotations that serve as fundamental building blocks of language. These representations also store general knowledge, which supports comprehension in specific contexts.

By contrast, *ad hoc* concepts are contextually adjusted meanings, created when a word's encoded sense is narrowed or broadened to suit a particular communicative situation (Yus 2006; Jarrah & Al-Jarrah 2023). They are pragmatically inferred during interpretation, functioning as temporary mental constructs relevant only to that occasion (Allott & Textor 2012). Their formation depends on contextual cues, available knowledge, and the pursuit of optimal relevance (Wilson & Sperber 2004).

This process can broaden meaning (e.g. using *Hoover* to refer to all vacuum cleaners) or narrow it to a more specific sense. Relevance theory further links *ad hoc* concepts to metaphor, hyperbole, and other non-literal uses, viewing them as manifestations of the same underlying mechanism: adjusting conceptual content to achieve maximal contextual effect with minimal cognitive effort.

An example of the distinction between concepts and *ad hoc* concepts is comparing *ad hoc* concepts to shopping lists. A shopping list for a one-time event is created for a specific purpose and then discarded afterward, much like an *ad hoc* concept that is used only in a specific context and doesn't endure (Allott & Textor 2012). Consider Table 1, which includes an example taken from the official Netflix subtitles of the sitcom *Friends* (Season 1). This example illustrates the creation of the *ad hoc* concept *ʔalmaqʕaf* ('canteen') in the subtitle.

Table 1: Example of *ad hoc* concept construction

The Source Utterance	Netflix's Subtitle
Alright, so I'm back in high school, I'm standing in the middle of the cafeteria , and I realize I am totally naked.	حسناً. كنت في الثانوية أقف في وسط المقصف حين اكتشفت أنني عار تماماً. ḥasanan kuntu fi: ʔal θa:nawijjah ʔaqifu fi: waʕ ʔalmaqʕaf ḥi:na ʔiktaʕaftu ʔannani: ʕa:rin tama:man (‘ok, I was in high school standing in the middle of the canteen when I realized I am totally naked.’)

In this example, the concept of “cafeteria” mentioned in the source language has been modified into the *ad hoc* concept of “canteen” in the subtitle. The word *cafeteria* typically refers to a place where food and beverages are served in a public setting, and it carries a specific meaning in many contexts. However, the subtitler has chosen to translate it as *ʔalmaqʕaf* ('canteen') instead of the more direct equivalent *kafiterja*: ('cafeteria'). This decision was made based on the specific context in which the concept *cafeteria* was used, namely, within a school environment. In the Arab world, especially in public schools, the concept *canteen* is more commonly used to refer to the food service areas, as opposed to *cafeteria*, which might imply a different, more formal or commercial setting. Therefore, the subtitler's adjustment ensures that the translation is both contextually appropriate and culturally relevant for the target audience.

Ad hoc concepts therefore refer to contextually adjusted meanings that arise during communication when a speaker pragmatically modifies a lexical concept to fit a specific discourse situation. This modification involves processes such as narrowing (restricting meaning), broadening (extending meaning), or a combination of both (Wilson & Carston 2007). Unlike fixed lexical meanings, *ad hoc* concepts are constructed dynamically based on contextual cues, speaker intentions, and hearer inferences. They play a crucial role in resolving ambiguity and enriching utterance interpretation, making them essential to theories of relevance theory and lexical pragmatics (Sperber & Wilson 1995; Carston 2002).

The primary purpose of this research is to examine how *ad hoc* concepts are rendered in the English subtitles of Arabic utterances, focusing on the interplay between linguistic meaning and contextual adaptation in translation. Specifically, this study investigates the extent to which subtitlers modify conceptual meanings when translating from colloquial Jordanian Arabic into English, analyzing how pragmatic adjustments such as narrowing, broadening, or a combination of both, shape the final translation. Given that *ad hoc* concepts emerge dynamically within discourse, their translation poses a unique challenge, requiring subtitlers to balance linguistic fidelity with contextual intelligibility. By exploring how these modifications occur, this research sheds light on the strategies used to manage linguistic ambiguity in

audiovisual translation, a field where meaning must often be compressed and adapted due to spatial and temporal constraints.

To achieve this, the study examines data drawn from the film *The Alleys* (2021), a Jordanian production available on Netflix, analyzing instances where *ad hoc* concepts and figurative expressions appear in the Arabic dialogue and how they are rendered in the English subtitles. This film provides a rich linguistic and cultural context, as it authentically represents spoken Jordanian Arabic in a socially and culturally embedded setting. By focusing on subtitling, a translation mode that requires conciseness while maintaining communicative intent, this research not only identifies how meaning is pragmatically reconstructed but also evaluates the extent to which cultural and contextual factors influence translation choices.

4. Methods

As mentioned earlier, this study examines Arabic utterances in the film *The Alleys* (2021) and explores the *ad hoc* concepts created by the subtitler to convey these utterances in context. The selected film is presented in the Jordanian dialect, and the data were collected by watching the original movie on Netflix with its English subtitles. Through repeated viewings, the researchers manually identified instances of *ad hoc* concepts by comparing the original Arabic expressions with their English translations, which had been adjusted *ad hoc*. Additionally, the definition of *ad hoc* concepts provided by Sperber & Wilson (1995) served as the reference point for identifying relevant examples.

To enhance the organization and effectiveness of the analysis, the identified *ad hoc* terms were categorized into two main types: *ad hoc* concepts shaped by the course of events within the film and those influenced by the Jordanian sociocultural context. All examples are presented in tables, displaying the original Arabic utterance with its phonetic transcription, and its English subtitle to illustrate how the subtitler adapted the meaning.

The film *The Alleys*, which became available on Netflix in 2021, stars Ali, a young man from a rough neighborhood in Amman, who deceives wealthy guests while trying to be with his lover, Lana. Their relationship is opposed by Lana's mother, Aseel, who turns to a gang leader, Abbas, leading to violence and revenge. Ali steals Abbas's money and flees with Lana, but she rejects his dishonesty, and Aseel, in a fit of rage, fatally stabs him. As she attempts to cover up the crime, new conflicts arise involving blackmail and stolen money.

The film was selected due to the significant number of *ad hoc* translations in its subtitles. This is largely because the main characters come from a poor, working-class background and frequently use colloquial Jordanian expressions. These informal and culturally specific terms often require creative translation strategies to retain their meaning and essence in the subtitles.

5. Findings

The study's findings indicate the identification of 82 instances of *ad hoc* concepts in the English subtitles. As previously noted, for the sake of clarity in discussion, these instances have been categorized into two distinct types: *ad hoc* concepts shaped by the course of events within the film and those influenced by the Jordanian sociocultural context. Each category will be examined separately. Table 2 shows the number of the identified examples on each category.

Table 2: The number of the identified examples on each category

<i>Ad hoc</i> concepts type	The number of examples detected	The percentage
<i>Ad hoc</i> concepts shaped by the course of events	32	39%
<i>Ad hoc</i> concepts influenced by the Jordanian sociocultural context	50	61%

The table provides a quantitative breakdown of the identified *ad hoc* concepts, categorizing them into two main types: those shaped by the course of events and those influenced by the Jordanian sociocultural context. The distribution of examples highlights a notable imbalance, with 61% of the instances falling under the sociocultural category, while only 39% are linked to event-driven modifications. This suggests that subtitlers often engage in significant conceptual adjustments due to cultural influences rather than merely adapting meanings based on the unfolding narrative. The dominance of sociocultural *ad hoc* concepts underscores the complexities of translating culturally embedded expressions. Unlike event-driven modifications, which rely on immediate narrative context, sociocultural adaptations demand a deeper understanding of local customs, social norms, and linguistic conventions. This finding highlights the importance of cultural competence in subtitling, as failure to account for these influences may result in loss of meaning or misinterpretation. Additionally, the data suggests that subtitlers prioritize audience comprehension over literal accuracy, reinforcing the view that translation is a dynamic, context-sensitive process.

5.1. Ad Hoc concepts shaped by the course of events

The findings of the study indicate that subtitlers frequently employ ad hoc concepts when rendering culturally and contextually loaded expressions. Addressing the second research question, this section examines cases in which such concepts are shaped primarily by the immediate course of events in the film. This category encompasses concepts that the subtitler has modified to align with the narrative progression and contextual demands of the film's events. In other words, the rationale behind adjusting these concepts lies in facilitating audience comprehension by ensuring their meanings resonate with the intended message conveyed in the specific scenes where they appear. Below are selected examples (see Tables 3–7), each accompanied by a contextual explanation and a subsequent discussion to clarify the relevant points.

Table 3: *Ad hoc* concept creation for *mrattab*

The Source Utterance	The Subtitle
كل مرة بتشوف عندي زبون مرتب بتوخذه مني kul marra bitʃu:f ʕindi zbu:n mrattab btu:xðoh minni: (Lit. 'Every time she sees that I have a neat customer, she takes him from me.')	Every time she sees me with a rich customer, she swoops in.

In this example, the conversation takes place between two women working at a nightclub. One of them is complaining to the other about a third woman who appears to attract her wealthier patrons. The Arabic adjective *mrattab* carries different connotations depending on context, with its conventional English equivalent being *neat*. For instance, when describing a man, *mrattab* can imply that he is well-groomed and takes care of his appearance; when describing a house, it can suggest that the place is tidy and well-organized. In the nightclub setting, a *mrattab* customer is generally understood to be someone who spends generously, particularly with the women he interacts with. While the exact nature of the interaction is not explicitly stated in the dialogue, the subtitler rendered it as *rich* to convey the sense of a financially rewarding patron. This choice preserves the intended meaning while remaining neutral and accessible to English-speaking viewers.

Table 4: *Ad hoc* concept creation for *ʔaṣṣab*

The Source Utterance	The Subtitle
<p>أنا أخذت أصعب قرار بحياتي ʔana: ʔaxadit ʔaṣṣab qara:r biḥaja:ti: (Lit. ‘I took the hardest decision in my life.’)</p>	I made the most painful decision of my life.

In this scene, Ali’s wife is shocked to learn that her husband is a thief just one day after their marriage. She tells him that running away with him and getting married was the most difficult decision of her life. The film’s events also reveal that Lana, Ali’s wife, had a very close relationship with her mother, who raised her and faced many struggles to provide a decent life for her, especially since her mother is divorced.

Given this background, it seems the subtitler chose not to translate the superlative form *ʔaṣṣab* using its typical English equivalents like *the hardest* or *the toughest*. Instead, the subtitler opted for *the most painful*, which better reflects Lana’s emotional turmoil. This choice conveys the deep personal anguish she feels, having just left her mother to live with Ali. The translation captures the emotional weight of the decision, highlighting the internal conflict Lana experiences in this moment.

Table 5: *Ad hoc* concept creation for *faba:b*

The Source Utterance	The Subtitle
<p>شباب faba:b (Lit. ‘young men’)</p>	Boys

In this scene, Abbas, the undisputed leader of the neighborhood, is seen issuing orders to his men, instructing them to engage in acts of blackmail and intimidation. As he addresses them, he refers to them as *faba:b*.

Linguistically, the Arabic noun *faba:b* is the plural form of *fa:b* and literally means ‘young men.’ In colloquial Arabic, however, the term often functions as a pragmatic form of address used to refer to a group of male associates, subordinates, or companions, and its interpretation is largely determined by context. In this particular scene, Abbas occupies a clear position of authority over the men he is addressing, who carry out his orders without question.

The subtitler renders the term as *boys*, a choice that does not correspond exactly to the literal meaning of *faba:b* but captures the informal and hierarchical tone of Abbas's address. In English, *boys* is frequently used to refer to a group of male associates in a casual or commanding manner (e.g. Come on, boys), particularly when the speaker assumes a leadership role within the group. Within the context of the scene, this choice helps convey the pragmatic relationship between Abbas and his followers and reflects the dynamic of authority that structures their interaction.

From a relevance-theoretic perspective, the translation can therefore be interpreted as an *ad hoc* adjustment aimed at reproducing the pragmatic force of the source utterance rather than its literal lexical meaning. Instead of focusing strictly on the age-related sense of *young men*, the subtitle prioritizes the interpersonal tone and the group dynamic implied in the original dialogue, enabling the target audience to infer the hierarchical relationship between Abbas and his associates.

Table 6: *Ad hoc* concept creation for *zabbaṭit*

The Source Utterance	The Subtitle
يوميتها زبطت النتائج jumi:tha: zabbaṭit ʔinnata:ʔidʒ (Lit. 'That day, I fixed the results.')	I forged my grades.

The protagonist, Ali, is having a candid conversation with his wife. She mentions that she observed how overjoyed he appeared when the high school exam results were revealed. Ali then admits that his happiness was fake; in truth, he had failed the exams but had manipulated the results using Photoshop to give his family a sense of pride.

Ali uses the verb *zabbaṭit*, which in Jordanian Arabic generally means 'fixed' or 'made something right'. In this case, what he really means is that he tampered with his grades to make them look as if he had passed. However, the subtitler recognized that translating this verb literally, such as *I made my grades right*, could mislead English-speaking viewers by implying a positive action. To avoid this ambiguity and make Ali's confession clear, the subtitler opted for the word *forged*. This translation is not a direct equivalent of *zabbaṭit*, but it captures the true meaning of Ali's actions within the film's context. The subtitler ensures that viewers fully understand that Ali intentionally altered his results in a dishonest way, rather than merely fixing an error. This is an example of an *ad hoc* translation choice, where a new term is selected based on the surrounding events to ensure the intended message is conveyed accurately.

Table 7: *Ad hoc* concept creation for *thandisi:hom*

The Source Utterance	The Subtitle
بدي اياكي تزيبهم و تهنديهم biddi: ʔija:ki: tzabṭi:hom withandisi:hom (Lit. 'I want you to fix them and arrange them.')	I want you to doll them up and make them pretty.

In this scene, a customer arrives at a women's beauty salon with a group of girls and asks the hairdresser to enhance their appearance. In Arabic, the noun *handasa* directly translates to *engineering* in English. However, in Jordanian colloquial speech, the verb *handasa* carries a different meaning as it refers to skillfully arranging or refining something to make it as good as possible. For example, in the phrase *handasit ʔilqasdah* ('I engineered the gathering'), the meaning is that the gathering was planned and organized in an ideal way. Similarly, *handasit ʔilsufrāh* implies that the dining table was neatly arranged and decorated. Keeping this in mind, the subtitler chose to translate *handasi:hum* as *make them pretty* rather than opting for a literal translation like *engineer them*, which would sound unnatural in English. This *ad hoc* translation aligns with the specific context of a beauty salon. The subtitler ensures that the intended meaning is conveyed clearly and effortlessly to English-speaking viewers.

Building upon this point, it is essential to recognize that *ad hoc* concepts shaped by the course of events exemplify the subtitler's role as a mediator of meaning, aligning lexical items with the narrative flow and contextual nuances of the film. Such adjustments reflect the inherent fluidity of language, where meaning is not static but shaped by context and interaction, as emphasized in relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson 1995). When a subtitler modifies the concepts to match the unfolding events, he engages in what Gutt (2000) describes as a form of contextual adaptation, ensuring that the target audience's understanding is both accessible and coherent. This type of adjustment underscores the subtitler's pragmatics-driven decision-making, balancing the need for linguistic accuracy with the necessity of ensuring that the audience grasps the intended message in the context of the film's unfolding narrative.

Moreover, the adaptation of *ad hoc* concepts in line with the film's events highlights the dynamic and interpretive nature of translation, where meaning is constructed not merely by lexical equivalence but through a process of pragmatic enrichment (Carston 2002). The subtitler, in essence, plays the role of an interpreter of the story, navigating the intersections between language, context, and audience expectation, which reflects the broader understanding of communication as inherently context-dependent (Shaw 1987). Thus, the translation of *ad hoc* concepts shaped by events is not only an act of linguistic transference but a nuanced process of cultural and contextual negotiation that contributes to the overall communicative success of the subtitled film. Subtitlers thus facilitate the bridge between two linguistic worlds while preserving the integrity of the original message.

A comparison of the verbs in Tables 6 and 7 demonstrates how the same Jordanian Arabic verb *zabbat* ('fix') can take on different pragmatic meanings depending on context. In Table 6, *zabbatet* refers to Ali's act of tampering with his exam results, which is morally and contextually negative; the subtitler chose *forged* to convey the dishonest action accurately to English-speaking viewers. In contrast, in Table 7, *zabti:hom* ('fix them') retains a positive and skillful nuance, referring to enhancing the appearance of a group of women in a beauty salon. Here, the subtitler rendered it as *doll them up* or *make them pretty*, capturing the practical, aesthetic action rather than a literal translation like *fix them*, which would not convey the intended meaning. These examples highlight the importance of context in determining *ad hoc* translations: the same verb may require radically different English renderings depending on whether the action is evaluatively positive or negative and on the pragmatic cues within the scene.

Having explored how *ad hoc* concepts are shaped by the progression of the film's events, the next section shifts focus to another significant category: *ad hoc* concepts influenced by the Jordanian sociocultural context. These concepts reflect the deeper, culturally embedded meanings that subtitlers must navigate to ensure that the audience fully understands not only

the narrative but also the cultural nuances integral to the story. This section delves into how cultural references, social norms, and local practices shape the translation process, emphasizing the subtitler's role in adapting these concepts to a broader, often non-localized, audience.

5.2. Ad hoc concepts influenced by the Jordanian sociocultural context

While the previous section demonstrated how *ad hoc* concepts can be shaped by the immediate events of the film, the examples in this section illustrate that subtitlers may also rely on broader contextual factors. The instances in this category illustrate that the subtitler intentionally generated *ad hoc* interpretations influenced by Jordanian culture. Certain cultural expressions prompt the subtitler to devise contextually appropriate *ad hoc* renderings, which correspond to these cultural nuances. Note here that our assumption that the subtitler is guided by cultural factors in these cases does not imply that the context of the movie's events is irrelevant. Rather, it indicates that both cultural influences and situational context interact in shaping the translation choices. These examples are further categorized into two groups: non-figurative cultural *ad hoc* concepts and figurative cultural *ad hoc* concepts. As indicated in Table 2 above, this category comprises a total of 50 examples, with 44 being non-figurative and the remaining 6 classified as figurative.

5.2.1. Non-figurative cultural ad hoc concepts

Non-figurative cultural *ad hoc* concepts refer to constructions that the subtitler has specifically crafted to align with Jordanian cultural expressions. These translations aim to make it easier for the audience to understand the meaning with a minimal effort by providing translations *ad hoc* to align with the Jordanian expressions. The goal is to ensure that the viewers can grasp the intended meaning with no confusion, reflecting the cultural context in a way that feels natural for non- Jordanian audience. Consider Table 8.

Table 8: *Ad hoc* concept creation for *ʔil-ʔadʔdʔah*

The Source Utterance	The Subtitle
<p>الحجة مقرزيتي ʔil-ʔadʔdʔah mqazzizi:tɪ: (Lit. 'The old woman disgusted me.')</p>	My mom is bugging me.

In this example, one of Abbas's men is trying to secure a loan, explaining that his mother is constantly nagging him for money. The term *ʔil-ʔadʔdʔah* in Jordanian Arabic generally refers to an elderly woman, but in this specific context it idiomatically refers to the speaker's mother. Understanding the cultural context, the subtitler adapted the term for the English-speaking audience, rendering it as *mom* rather than a literal translation, to ensure clarity and accessibility. This choice reflects the subtitler's sensitivity to Jordanian expressions and everyday language use, conveying the intended pragmatic meaning while maintaining the informal and familiar tone appropriate for the scene.

The conversation from which the utterance in Table 9 was extracted took place in a women's salon, where one woman was attempting to persuade another to consider a particular girl as a potential bride for her son. While showing a picture of the girl, the groom-to-be's mother responded with *ha:j qawjjeh ʔana baʔrifha* which, when translated literally, means 'She is strong, I know her.'

Table 9: *Ad hoc* concept creation for *qawjjeh*

The Source Utterance	The Subtitle
هاي قوية أنا بعرفها <i>ha:j qawjjeh ʔana baʕrifha</i> (Lit. ‘She is strong, I know her.’)	I know her, she is too opinionated.

The Arabic adjective *qawjj* (‘strong’) is highly versatile and can be used to describe people, objects, or even abstract stances in various contexts. For instance, it can refer to a person’s physical strength, such as someone who works out at the gym. It can also describe the durability of an object, like a shelf that can support heavy weights. Additionally, it may be used to characterize a woman as having a strong personality. Nonetheless, in the Jordanian sociocultural context, when a mother searching for a bride for her son rejects a candidate by describing her as *qawjjeh*; the intended meaning is not related to physical strength or financial independence. Instead, it conveys that the woman has a strong personality, firm opinions, and a level of assertiveness that may be perceived as undesirable in a traditional marital setting. Recognizing this cultural nuance, the subtitler opted for an *ad hoc* translation, rendering *qawjjeh* as *opinionated*. This choice reflects an *ad hoc* linguistic adaptation, tailored specifically to the Jordanian context of the bride selection, ensuring that the intended meaning is conveyed naturally to English-speaking viewers.

In this scene, the barber was complimenting a customer on his appearance, admiring how well-groomed and elegant he looked. Following the compliment, the barber asked him whether he wanted to “do it again.” Consider Table 10.

Table 10: *Ad hoc* concept creation for *tʔanni*:

The Source Utterance	The Subtitle
بدك تتني <i>biddak tʔanni</i> : (Lit. ‘Do you want to take two?’)	Are you looking for a second wife?

In colloquial Jordanian Arabic, the verb *ʔiʔanni*: generally means to do something a second time. For instance, if someone finishes a sandwich, they might be asked *biddak tʔanni:?*, meaning ‘Do you want another one?’. However, in this particular context, the barber was not simply referring to repeating an action in a general sense, he was making a humorous reference to the idea of taking a second wife. In Jordanian culture, when a married man suddenly starts paying extra attention to his appearance, dressing sharply, grooming himself meticulously, and making noticeable efforts to look his best, those around him often tease him by suggesting that he may be considering a second marriage. Since Islam permits polygamy under certain conditions, this kind of lighthearted remark is a common cultural joke. The customer’s refined appearance, combined with the barber’s playful tone, provided clear contextual clues that helped the subtitler craft a translation that aligns with the intended humor and cultural connotations.

The translation of non-figurative cultural *ad hoc* concepts underscores the fundamental role of cultural competence in subtitling, aligning closely with the principles of relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson 1995). According to this framework, communication is guided by

the principle of optimal relevance, where the speaker (or in this case, the subtitler) must provide an utterance that yields maximum cognitive effects with minimal processing effort. In the context of subtitling, a literal translation of culturally embedded expressions may result in cognitive overload for the target audience, as they would need to infer unfamiliar cultural references without sufficient contextual cues. Instead, by strategically selecting a translation that conveys the cultural essence of the original expression, the subtitler enhances accessibility, ensuring that the intended meaning is immediately inferable without unnecessary cognitive strain. This aligns with Gutt's (1991) concept of indirect translation, which prioritizes communicative efficiency over rigid lexical fidelity, thereby facilitating an enriched interpretative experience for the audience.

Furthermore, the adaptation of non-figurative cultural *ad hoc* concepts exemplifies the inferential nature of meaning construction, a central tenet in pragmatic theory. Unlike direct lexical substitution, which assumes stable cross-linguistic equivalence, the rendering of culturally bound expressions demands pragmatic enrichment (Carston 2002). This process involves the context-driven modulation of meaning, where subtitlers strategically modify conceptual representations to ensure cultural relevance and contextual fit. Without such an adaptation, the audience would be forced to engage in extensive inferencing, potentially leading to misinterpretation or cognitive fatigue. As Mey (2001) asserts, meaning is not an inherent property of words but an outcome of situated language use, shaped by socio-cultural frameworks. Thus, subtitlers function as pragmatic mediators, dynamically balancing linguistic economy, cultural authenticity, and audience accessibility to optimize the communicative efficacy of the translated text.

5.2.2. Figurative ad hoc concepts

According to the relevance theory, figurative uses of the language are *ad hoc* constructions as they are considered as a kind of broadening the meaning intended (Carston 2002; Wilson & Carston 2007). Figurative language is a type of descriptive language used to convey meaning in a way that differs from its literal meaning. This includes figurative similes, metaphors, hyperbole, and allusions among others. Consider Table 11.

Table 11: *Ad hoc* concept creation for *ʃa:jɪfni: 'qa:ʕdah ʕala: bank*

The Source Utterance	The Subtitle
<p style="text-align: right;">شايّفني قاعة عينك؟</p> <p>ʃa:jɪfni: 'qa:ʕdah ʕabank (Lit. 'Do you see me sitting on a bank?')</p>	<p>Do I look like a bank teller to you?</p>

In this example, Hanadi, Abbas's assistant, refuses to give one of Abbas's men a loan by saying *ʃa:jɪfni: 'qa:ʕdah ʕala: bank?* which literally translates as 'Do you see me sitting on a bank?'. The utterance functions as a figurative expression rather than a literal statement. In Jordanian colloquial usage, the expression evokes the idea that the speaker is being treated as if they had unlimited access to money and could provide it whenever requested. Thus, the pragmatic meaning of the utterance is not simply that the speaker is wealthy, but that she rejects the assumption that she should supply money on demand.

The subtitler rendered the line as *Do I look like a bank teller to you?*. Although this translation departs from the literal imagery of the Arabic expression, it preserves the underlying implicature that the speaker is not responsible for dispensing money whenever others request it. The reference to a bank teller foregrounds the role of someone expected to provide cash upon request, thereby recreating the pragmatic effect of the original utterance within a culturally accessible frame for the target audience. From a relevance-theoretic perspective, the translation can therefore be viewed as an *ad hoc* construction that seeks to reproduce the communicative intention of the source utterance rather than its literal metaphor.

As in the Arabic dialogue, the subtitler does not explicitly state the implicature ('I don't have money' or 'I will not give you money'). Instead, the translation preserves the inferential nature of the original expression, allowing viewers to derive the intended meaning through contextual interpretation. In this way, the subtitle maintains the pragmatic structure of the source utterance while adapting its figurative imagery to the expectations of the target audience.

In Jordan, *bari:zah* refers to a coin valued at 10% of a Jordanian Dinar. As a result, this term is primarily associated with money in the Jordanian context. Yet, in colloquial Jordanian Arabic, it has also developed figurative meanings. It is sometimes used metaphorically to describe someone as insignificant or unimportant. This comparison stems from the fact that *bari:zah* is a low-value coin, making it a fitting metaphor for worthlessness. Now consider Table 12.

Table 12: *Ad hoc* concept creation for *ʔiqḷaḷḷak ḥalbari:zah*

The Source Utterance	The English Subtitle
<p>معلم اصرفلك هالبريزة mʕallim ʔiṣriflak ḥalbari:zah (Lit. 'Boss, get rid of this coin.)</p>	Check out this fool.

In the context of this example, Ali's best friend visited the bar Ali frequently attended. Since it was his first time there, he ordered orange juice. This unusual request led the bar worker to ask his boss to remove him, referring to him as *bari:zah*. Recognizing the cultural significance of this figurative expression, the subtitler used the translation *fool*, as it conveys the idea that Ali's friend was out of place for ordering juice in a bar.

Table 13 includes an utterance from a conversation between Ali and his best friend, who was trying to persuade him to accept living in their modest neighborhood in east Amman and to take over his grandfather's small supermarket.

Table 13: *Ad hoc* concept creation for *ʔinta ʕa:jif bira:sak*

The Source Utterance	The Subtitle
<p>انت عايش براسك و بس ʔinta ʕa:jif bira:sak wbas (Lit. 'You're living in your head, and that's it.)</p>	You have your head in the clouds.

When Ali rejected the idea, his friend responded with *ʔinta ʕa:jif bira:sak wi bas*, which literally translates into English as ‘you live only in your head.’ This phrase, common in Jordanian culture, is figurative; no one literally lives in their head. The meaning behind this expression is that Ali is detached from reality, living in his own world and disconnected from the practical concerns of others, with plans and ideas that exist only in his imagination.

Figurative *ad hoc* concepts, as defined by Wilson & Carston (2007) and Carston (2010: 154–56), arise from pragmatic processes of broadening or narrowing lexical meaning to fit a communicative context. When such concepts carry strong cultural connotations, translation demands more than contextual inference, it requires sensitivity to the meta-cultural framework in which they are embedded. For example, the Jordanian Arabic phrase *ʔinta ʕa:jif bira:sak wi bas* (‘you live only in your head’) conveys not only detachment from reality but also a culturally grounded critique of neglecting practicality and social duty. Rendering it as *you have your head in the clouds* captures the cognitive detachment but not the full socio-cultural force. In relevance theory terms (Sperber & Wilson 1995), optimal translation maximizes contextual effects while minimizing processing effort. Here, cultural competence, not film context alone, is essential for reconstructing an equivalent conceptualization, underscoring the translator’s role as both pragmatic interpreter and cultural mediator.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the pivotal role that *ad hoc* concept formation plays in subtitling, particularly in rendering Arabic utterances into English. The analysis shows that subtitlers do far more than replace one word with another; they engage in pragmatic reasoning that is finely attuned to cultural and contextual signals. Carston (2010) argues that *ad hoc* concepts emerge through broadening and narrowing processes, allowing speakers to communicate meanings that are only partially encoded in linguistic form. For subtitlers, the challenge is to reconstruct these pragmatically enriched meanings in a way that maintains optimal relevance (Sperber & Wilson 1995) while ensuring that the audience can access them without undue cognitive effort. This balance, between semantic fidelity and pragmatic equivalence, requires deep cultural competence alongside linguistic skill.

A key contribution of this research is its demonstration that context, both micro and macro, is indispensable in subtitling *ad hoc* concepts. At the micro level, subtitlers must consider the immediate discourse, speaker intentions, and the inferential pathways the audience is likely to follow (Gutt 2000). At the macro level, they must work within broader sociohistorical and cultural frameworks. As the data reveal, certain *ad hoc* concepts are culture-bound, demanding culturally resonant equivalents rather than literal renderings. This aligns with audiovisual translation (AVT) scholarship (Gambier 2009; Pérez-González 2014; Chaume 2018; Díaz Cintas & Remael 2020;), which views subtitling as a form of intercultural mediation, where pragmatic and cultural competence are as vital as linguistic accuracy.

Two primary types of *ad hoc* concepts emerge in Arabic–English subtitling. Non-figurative cultural *ad hoc* concepts involve culturally marked terms whose meanings are shaped by context. Here, subtitlers must decide whether to domesticate or foreignize (Venuti 1995), balancing cultural retention with audience accessibility. Figurative *ad hoc* concepts, by contrast, involve metaphors and idioms anchored in local cultural presuppositions. Their translation demands not only linguistic skill but also the ability to map

metaphorical meaning onto a functionally equivalent expression in English (Kövecses 2005). When these pragmatic and cultural layers are ignored, meaning loss is almost inevitable, leading to either distortion or an overload of interpretive effort for the viewer.

Theoretically, this study advances pragmatic equivalence as a central concern in subtitling. While AVT research has long discussed formal and dynamic equivalence (Nida 1964), our findings show that pragmatic equivalence, faithfulness to intended meaning as reconstructed through context, is indispensable (Baker 2018; Díaz Cintas & Remael 2020). It also strengthens the case for integrating pragmatics into translator training, especially for subtitling. Following Gutt's (2000) view of translation as an inferential process, subtitlers must be trained to identify *ad hoc* conceptual shifts and choose strategies that best achieve relevance for the target audience.

Beyond theory, the study has clear professional implications. As global streaming platforms like Netflix expand access to cross-cultural content, demand for high-quality subtitling continues to grow. Yet, as Díaz Cintas and Anderman (2008: 84–86) note, subtitlers often work under significant time and space constraints, which frequently require the condensation or omission of parts of the original dialogue. Our findings reaffirm that subtitlers are not just linguistic converters; they are cultural mediators. Finally, the research underscores a caution regarding technology in subtitling. While machine translation and AI-assisted tools are increasingly common, they lack the inferential capacity to handle context-dependent *ad hoc* concepts, relying instead on statistical patterns (Toral & Way 2015). For this reason, human subtitlers remain essential, particularly when pragmatic sensitivity, cultural depth, and relevance-driven decision-making are at stake.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

This study has demonstrated that the translation of *ad hoc* concepts in subtitling is a highly pragmatic process, requiring a deep engagement with both linguistic and cultural contexts. Drawing on insights from relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson 1995) and pragmatic inference (Levinson 2000), the findings highlight that subtitlers do not merely transfer lexical meanings but must engage in interpretive adjustments that maximize contextual effects while minimizing the audience's cognitive effort. In translating *ad hoc* concepts, subtitlers must navigate between broadening, narrowing, and conceptual shifts (Carston 2002), ensuring that the pragmatic force of an utterance is preserved across languages. This study illustrates that subtitling operates on a hierarchical structure of meaning construction, wherein micro-contextual cues interact with macro-cultural knowledge. In the case of *The Alleys* (2021), Jordanian cultural markers significantly influenced translation decisions, demonstrating that subtitlers must often prioritize meta-filmic cultural mediation over direct linguistic correspondence.

The pedagogical implications of these findings reinforce the necessity of incorporating pragmatics into audiovisual translation (AVT) training programs. As pragmatic competence is central to effective subtitling, curricula should integrate theoretical models from pragmatics, particularly relevance theory, to enhance translators' ability to handle context-dependent meaning negotiation. This aligns with Gutt's (2000) argument that translation is a form of interlinguistic communication that depends on inferential processes rather than code-matching equivalence. Additionally, the study calls for an interdisciplinary approach that bridges translation studies with discourse analysis, cognitive pragmatics, and media studies, ensuring

that subtitlers are equipped to manage the intricate balance between linguistic form, communicative intent, and cultural representation.

In the era of global streaming platforms, where audiovisual content reaches culturally diverse audiences, pragmatic challenges in subtitling have become more pressing than ever. Future research should extend the current inquiry by examining how subtitlers across different languages and genres handle *ad hoc* conceptual translation, investigating the extent to which multimodal constraints influence pragmatic adaptation. Furthermore, given the increasing role of AI in subtitling, it is crucial to assess whether machine translation systems can effectively process context-sensitive *ad hoc* concepts or if human intervention remains indispensable. By addressing these issues, scholars and practitioners can ensure that subtitling remains an efficient and culturally attuned medium of cross-linguistic communication, fostering more nuanced and effective intercultural exchange in an increasingly interconnected world.

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