Subtitling strategies of swear words and taboo expressions in the movie “Training Day”

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ABSTRACT

Translators face some problems when they translate swear words and taboo expressions, as they belong to different cultures and they have different impacts on the audience. Although some studies examined the problems faced in translating swear words and how to deal with them, little is known about studies that examined the strategies employed in translating such words and expressions from English into Arabic. Therefore, this study examines the strategies employed in translating such words and expressions from English into Arabic in the “Training Day” movie; and to assess the quality of subtitling these expressions. Samples from the movie were selected and analyzed. The results of the study showed that the subtitler used different strategies to subtitle swear and taboo words and expressions. Two of the most common strategies were found to be translating the swear and taboo words euphemistically, and by omission. As regards, the quality of the subtitles, they were found to be of good quality. This study concludes by proposing a model for subtitling swear words and Taboo expressions.

1. Introduction

There are different languages and cultures around the world, whereby communication between those different cultures and countries occur; therefore, translation has become an essential and important task in our daily life. For this purpose, different works from different cultures have always been translated. One important genre that has always been taken care of in translation is movie subtitling. This has helped bridge the gap between the different cultures. Nowadays, people watch American movies for fun and for even learning English. These movies, however, are always abundant with swear and taboo words and expressions. These words and expressions might cause a challenge for a translator. Swearing and taboo words are called a bad language. They are a common phenomenon, especially in movies. Today, new generations, young people in particular, use bad language to express their frustration, fear, nervousness, surprise, annoyance, gladness and disbelief. These words are used in several western movies; for this reason, subtitling has become an important issue (Prihartanti, 2012; Pesah, 2015; Pratama, 2017). They are an integral part of the spoken English, and they are used for different purposes. In this regard, Hughes (1988) classified the use of swear words into eight categories, based on the pragmatic and grammatical functions. These categories are:

- Personal: in which, ‘you’ plus the swearword are used, e.g. ‘you fuck’
- Personal by reference: in which a reference is used in addition to the swear word such as ‘what the fuck?’, ‘who the fuck?’
- Destination: such as fuck off
- Cursing: such as ‘fuck you’
- General expletive: indicative of annoyance or pain such as ‘Fuck!’
- Explicit expletive: indicative of annoyance or pain such as ‘Fuck it!’
- Phrasal verb: such as ‘fuck about’ or ‘fuck up’
- Adjectival extension: such ‘fucking’, ‘shitty’

Battistella (2005) classifies swearwords into three categories: epithets such as ‘bitch, fag; profanity’ such as ‘Goddamn and hell; and ‘obscenity/vulgarity’ such as ‘fuck and shit’. In a similar vein, McEnery and Xiao (2004) categorized the use of ‘fuck’ into nine categories. They are quoted below (see Table 1):

Actually, swear words and taboo expressions are kind of prohibited in some societies because of social and cultural factors. Many words and expressions in the movies are viewed as ‘taboo’, such as those which are used to describe sex, our bodies and their functions, and those which are used to insult other people. A swear word is the word used to express anger, deception, surprise and so on (Prihartanti, 2012). Wardhaugh (2000) defines the meaning of taboo as “the prohibition or avoidance of a...
behavior in one culture because it is perceived as harmful to its members by causing them fear, humiliation or shame, p.234.

Some studies investigated the strategies employed in subtitling Arabic movies. Dabbas and Haider (2020) examined the cultural difficulties in subtitling the American animated sitcom Family Guy into Arabic and the strategies used in subtitling the cultural references especially taboo and swear words, and they found that there are constraints in subtitling these words. These constraints are governed by the nature of the audience. Such constraints forced the translator to opt for specific strategies such as the use of euphemistic expression and omission. In a similar vein, Almijrab (2020) investigated the extent the taboo words and expressions are translatable. He concluded that euphemism is the most appropriate translation strategy when dealing with taboo words, because of the Islamic background of the Arab audience. Al-Yasin and Rabab’ah (2019) examined the connotative equivalence of taboo words in American hip hop movies and their Arabic correspondence in the subtitle/Audiovisual Translation (AVT). They found that Arab amateur subtitlers used omission and euphemism as translation techniques, and this was induced by the cultural constraints between English and Arabic.

However, translation of swear words and taboo expressions in movies is not a simple job. It requires employing specific subtitling strategies. Thus, this study examines the strategies used to translate swear words and taboo expressions, and it also assesses the quality of the translation of these swear and taboo words and expressions in the movie entitled Training Day (2001), a movie directed by Antoine Fuqua (Fuqua, 2001), and written by David Ayer.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Subtitling strategies

Translators use a number of strategies to subtitile swear and taboo words. This study sheds light on subtitiling strategies related to the concept of culture in the American Movie called "Training Day". In this regard, Pedersen (2011) suggested some strategies to subtitile culture-bound terms, and since taboo and swear words tend to be culture terms, this model was adopted in this study. In addition to Pedersen’s strategies, the strategies proposed by Abdelaal (2019) were adopted. Some of these strategies are ST-oriented while others are TT-oriented. These strategies are unpacked below:

1. Retention: this strategy is similar to borrowing strategy proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), in which the ST item is retained in the TT or slightly adapted to the TL norms. It is the most faithful strategy to the ST as it transfers the ST term completely to the TT (Pedersen, 2005). Faithful is used here to refer to the extent the ST lexis is maintained in the TT. This strategy is mostly used in translating proper nouns. For example, translating John as جون; however, it is not always successful with all nouns. A case in point is "Austria, England... etc.", which are rendered into different equivalents in Arabic.

2. Specification: in this case the ST item is not translated in the TT, but it is explained through either: a)addition, or b)completion. In addition, explicitation or addition is used to explicate the ST item. Explicitation occurs for the purpose of rendering some implicit meaning explicit or explicating a shortened name or acronym. This can take place in translating acronyms or names by adding first or last name to clarify the meaning (Pedersen, 2005). Addition happens when the translator adds some information that is latent to the ST for clarification purpose.

3. Direct translation: it is a direct word for word translation, which is mostly used for translating names of institutions and common names (Pedersen, 2005). There are two types of direct translation, viz., calque and shifts. Calque is a kind of exoticism that conveys intact literal translation. However, shifts imply a kind of shift in terms of grammar.

Regarding TT-oriented strategies, they are:

1. Generalization (superordinate term or paraphrase): this happens when the ST lexical item is translated into a more general term. In other words, a ST hypernym may be translated into its superordinate.

2. Substitution (cultural or situational): this is similar to ‘equivalence’, which is proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet. Using this strategy implies rendering a ST item into a culturally-equivalent TT item.

3. Omission: it occurs when the ST term is omitted and not translated in the TT.

Having discussed the strategies proposed by Pedersen, in the following section the strategies proposed by Abdelaal (2019) are discussed. Abdelaal proposed two strategies, which are TT-oriented strategies. These two strategies are elaborated on below.

1. Rendering informal language into formal language: this happens when translator changes the register of the ST in the TT. They translate informal language into formal language to either widen the platform of audience who can only understand formal language, or to avoid the use of some words in the TL, which cannot be used in a family context. Families usually watch movies together, where it is socially and religiously unacceptable to watch or see taboo words, be sex-related words, or any other similar swear and taboo words. Although the target audience can be young people who go cinemas, it is more common these days that people watch movies at home on YouTube or on TV.

2. Rendering the ST items euphemistically: this strategy is used when translating from English to Arabic because of the nature of the Arabic society which is constrained by religious and social factors that make it impossible to translate some ST words into Arabic. It is impossible from religious and social perspectives rather than translation perspectives. Translators usually observe the norms of the TT cultures and the social and religious aspect when they translate from any SI to a TL.

| Code | Description | Examples |
|------|-------------|----------|
| G    | General expletive | (Oh) fuck! |
| P    | Personal insult referring to defined entity | You fuck/to that fuck |
| C    | Cursing expletive | Fuck you/me/him/it! |
| D    | Destinational usage | Fuck off/he fucked off |
| L    | Literal usage denoting taboo referent | He fucked her |
| E    | Emphatic intensifier | Fucking marvellous/in the fucking car |
| O    | Pronominal form | Like fuck/fat as fuck |
| I    | Idiomatic 'set phrase' | Fuck all/give a fuck/thank fuck |
| X    | Metalinguistic or unclassifiable due to insufficient context | The use of the word ‘fuck’/you never fucking
TABLE 2. Types of errors.

| Type of error | Score assigned | Description |
|---------------|----------------|-------------|
| Serious       | 1              | affect the subtitles and the subtitles to come and take time for viewers to rid of them |
| Standard      | 0.5            | ruin the subtitles for most viewers |
| Minor         | 0.25           | go unseen unless the audiences are very observant |

2.2. Quality assessment

This study is based on Pedersen’s (2017) FAR quality assessment model, whereby ‘F’ stands for Functional equivalence’, ‘A’ stands for Acceptability, and ‘R’ stands for ‘readability’. Functional equivalence is concerned with if the subtitles convey the speaker’s intended meaning; Acceptability is concerned with if the subtitles sound correct and natural in the target language; and Readability is concerned with if the subtitles can be read fluently and non-intrusively. Following the FAR Model, these three parameters are employed to test a quality of subtitles; these parameters are judged based on an error analysis typology. Errors are categorized into ‘minor’, ‘standard’ or ‘serious’ errors, whereby each type of error is assigned a score. Minor errors are those errors that can go unseen unless the audiences are very observant, and they are assigned a score of 0.25. Standard errors are errors that can ruin the subtitles for most viewers, and they are assigned a score of 0.5. Serious errors are errors that affect the subtitles and the subtitles to come and take time for viewers to get rid of them, and they are assigned a score of 1. These penalty scores, however, are not used throughout the model as explained in the sections to come. The table below makes it clearer (see Table 2).

In the next lines, the FAR Model components are unpacked.

**Functional equivalence**

Many scholars and researchers (e.g. Gottlieb, 2001; Pedersen, 2005, 2017) argue that functional equivalence is the most important type of equivalence in subtitling because of the time and space constraints that make other types of equivalence unimportant. Pedersen (2017) follows that it is important to convey the intended meaning without the need to render the lexical items verbatim. He adds that if the meaning is not conveyed in the subtitles while the utterances of the speaker were conveyed, this should be considered an error. Pedersen divides semantic equivalence errors in his model into two types: semantic errors and stylistic errors. The two types are explained below.

**Semantic errors**

According to Pedersen (2017), the penalty score for semantic equivalence are minor: 0.5, standard: 1, and serious: 2. Minor errors refer to the lexical errors that do not affect the plot of the movie or the primary meaning. Standard errors, however, happen when the subtitles show errors but still they do not affect the conveyance of the primary meaning and they do not disrupt viewers’ progress with the subsequent subtitles. They happen when some utterances that are integral to the plot are left without subtitling. As regards, serious errors, they are so erroneous to the extent that they affect the viewers’ understanding of the movie and affect the understanding of the subsequent subtitles.

**Stylistic errors**

Pedersen (2017) follows that stylistic errors do not obstruct the understanding of a movie, and therefore they are less serious than semantic errors.

**Acceptability**

The second parameter of the FAR Model is acceptability, and it centers around the extent a subtitle sounds natural and idiomatic. Acceptability errors are subdivided into three categories: grammar errors, spelling errors and errors of idiomaticity. Grammar errors can be assessed on the basis of minor, standard and serious errors. Minor errors are errors that can be noticed by grammarians only, e.g., using of who instead of whom. Serious errors impede reading and comprehension. Whereas, standard errors are those errors that neither hamper understanding nor go unnoticed by common people such as dropping the final tense marker in the third person singular in present simple tense. Spelling errors are also subdivided into serious, standard and minor errors. If it is just a spelling error, it will be rated as a minor error. However, if the error changes the meaning of a word, it will be assessed as a standard error. Serious errors make it difficult to read a word. Pedersen follows the NER1 Model in grading acceptability, which means that serious errors are penalized by 1, while Standard errors are penalized by 0.5. Minor errors are penalized by 0.25 in total, serious errors are those errors that yield false or misleading information, whereas standard errors are errors that impede comprehension or disrupt the coherent flow of text. Minor errors include errors of capitalization, apostrophes and insertion of small word (Romero-Fresco and Pöchhacker, 2017).

**Readability**

The third parameter of the FAR Model is readability. Readability errors are subdivided into errors of segmentation and spotting, punctuation and reading speed and line length. The following graph summarizes the FAR Model (adopted from Abdelaal, 2019).

3. Methodology

The main objectives of our study are to identify the strategies that are used to translate swear word and taboo expressions as well as assess the quality of the translation. Therefore, this study adopts mixed method approach, whereby qualitative analysis was used to identify the strategies used in the translation while quantitative measurements were used to assess the quality of the subtitles. In this regard, Strauss and Corbin (1990) define qualitative research as that research, which produces findings that are not reached through statistical procedures or other methods of quantification. However, quantitative research is more about statistical inferences and numbers. Numbers were used to assess the translation quality only, and there were no specific statistical tests used. Numbers were given to assess the subtitles based on the researchers’ background knowledge. The researchers are bilinguals who master English and Arabic; and therefore, can judge the translation quality. For more methodological details, please refer to the theoretical framework section.

In relation to sampling, this study adopts purposive sampling. The researcher chose the American movie “Training Day” and found 40 examples of using swear words or taboo words. These samples cover most but not all the swear and taboo words used in the movie. The data was manually collected from the American movie entitled “Training Day”. This is considered as a case study. The Movie is an American crime and drama film released in 2001, directed by Antoine Fouquet, written by David Eyrre, and starring Denzel Washington and Ethan Hawke. We have selected this movie because it is a good source for many swear and taboo words and expressions, which is one of the criteria of selecting samples in qualitative inquiry (Patton, 1990). Another reason for choosing this film is its popularity in the Arab world. The film was thoroughly analyzed using Pedersen’s (2005) subtitling strategy typology and Pedersen’s (2017) quality assessment model.

The movie was accessed on YouTube and the English and the Arabic subtitles were downloaded from https://yifs subtitles.org/movie-imdb/tt0139654. The English an Arabic subtitles were downloaded from the website without any modifications. The translation seems to done by an amateur who uses unreal name. The film’s events revolve around Jake Hewitt (played by Ethan Hawkie), the security officer who finally gets a
place in the anti-drug police in Los Angeles. On his first day of work, veteran investigator Alonzo Harris (played by Denzel Washington) is assigned to train him and explain the details of his daily work. Surprised by the nature of the work on the ground, Ethan never expected to work on the streets of Los Angeles filled with criminals and drug traffickers to be so different from the way he believed. The expert, Alonzo, himself, sees the secret world in crime and violates the law without any thought so different from the way he believed. The expert, Alonzo, himself, sees the secret world in crime and violates the law without any thought.

4. Results and discussion

In this section, strategies used in subtitling swear words and taboo expressions in the film have been exhaustively identified and described on the basis of the model proposed by Pedersen (2005, 2011). Then they are followed by quality assessment of the translations, based on the quality assessment model of Pedersen. It is noteworthy to mention that some examples were not included because they are redundant. Examples of retention were not given exhaustively because they are clear and any more examples will be redundant. The following graph summarizes the findings of the strategies used. However, ‘retention’ was not included because there are many examples of retention that were not presented in this study, as they seem redundant. For example, all proper nouns are examples of retention strategy.

As seen in Figure 1, omission and euphemism are the most frequent strategies (see Figure 2). These strategies are unpacked below.

1. Retention: This strategy is mostly used for rendering of nouns. This strategy is a borrowing strategy, whereby the ST words and expressions are transferred to the TT. In this movie, retention was used to translate the names of drugs and people. Examples of such a strategy use are provided below.

1a. 00:19:42,790–00:19:46,290
P.C.P. Primos.

1b. 00:05:48,790–00:05:51,143
They will kill you cursed guys

2. Specification: this strategy is divided into addition and completion when the culture-bound term is left untranslated, and it is indicated by adding additional information. Examples of such a strategy use are provided below.

2a. 00:05:48,790–00:05:49,790
Well, there was a D.U.I. Stop…

2b. 00:05:49,790–00:05:51,143
We did nothing; the girl is a prostitute

We didn't do shit, man!

As in the example 2a, the ST expression D.U.I, which stands for “driving under the influence”, was subtitled into سائق مخمور [driver] instead of translating it as ‘driving under influence’. This is a kind of specification through explicitation. However, in this case, explicitation is employed using more direct and clearer, yet, fewer words. Another example of specification strategy is provided below.

2c. 00:27:22,100–00:28:23,100
And they're going to blast you fools!

They will kill you cursed guys

As seen in example 2c, the word “fools” was subtitled as مراعين (cursed), which sounds more expressive than the ST word. This might be motivated by the subtitler’s desire to maintain the flow of the use of strong expressive words. However, the word could have been translated literally as مراعين, without affecting the flow of the movie. A quality assessment of specification-related examples is summarized in the table below (see Table 3).
As seen in the table above, example 2a shows a minor stylistic error, which is a functional equivalence error; and acceptability error in terms of spelling. Also, it has a minor error in readability because the subtitler used an English comma instead of Arabic comma. Example 2c has a standard error in functional equivalence as well, as the TT word is expressively stronger than the ST word.

5. Generalization

This is a kind of strategy that is used by a subtitler when he decides to use a hypernym for a ST word in the target language (Abdelaal, 2019). Examples of such a strategy use are discussed below.

3a. 00:06:15:52,060 --> 00:06:15,53,560
That's classic brick-Pack Mexican

As seen in example 2b, the ST expression 'brick-pack' was subtitled into عبارة كوكب مكسيكي. It is named after the package brand name that it comes in when smuggled across the Mexican border. The subtitler opted to translate the ST expression into a more general term that can be mentally accessed and perceived easily. The quality assessment is provided below (see Table 4).

As seen in the table, a minor error that does not affect meaning can be identified. The TT did not identify the brand type of the Mexican drug, which is common in the case of using generalization as a subtitling strategy.

6. Translation using a euphemistic expression

Actually, this strategy was not stated by Pedersen (2005, 2011), but it was proposed by Abdelaal (2019). In the Arabic culture, people tend not to talk about, watch or listen to sex-related issues openly or explicitly. This cultural difference obliges the subtitler to euphemistically render some sex-related words to make them more suitable to target culture viewers, which is a kind of physiological limitation (Malenova, 2015). Examples of such a strategy use are provided below.

4a. 00:06:07,04,360 --> 00:07:06,360
No shit. So, uh, لئس محروم.

This is not logical.

In 4a, the subtitler used a euphemistic expression to render the ST word 'shit' as لئس محروم instead of rendering it literally, or explicitly. This might have been done so as not to offend the viewers. The viewers could be family members who will feel embarrassed if the word is subtitled literally, or even using an equivalent word. Another example of the use of a euphemistic expression is provided below.

4b. 00:06:16,320 --> 00:02:18,330
Yep. Ate like a pig.

As seen in example 4b, the ST word ‘pig’ was translated euphemistically into لئس محروم (much). The ST word ‘Pig’ is used to metaphorically describe people who eat too much. However, the Arabic word for ‘pig’ has negative connotations, as pigs are not of the favorite animals for Muslims and it is not allowed to eat their meat. This prompted the translator to subtitle it into لئس محروم. Further, the ST expression is idiomatic in English and if translated literally, it may not be perceived by the Arab audience.

4c. 00:17:40,170 --> 00:17:42,670
Shut the fuck up, and just wait.

In 4c, the ST verb ‘fuck’ is a taboo verb and it is rude to use in English as well. However, native English speakers make frequent use of the verb ‘fuck’, which is not acceptable, though used, in Arabic. Although the subtitler translated the word into an impolite and rude word, that is، امزح، it is a euphemistic translation of the ST word ‘fuck’, which sounds strikingly rude.

In 4, the ST verb ‘fuck’ is a taboo verb and it is rude to use in English as well. However, native European speakers make frequent use of the verb ‘fuck’, which is not acceptable, though used, in Arabic. Although the subtitler translated the word into an impolite and rude word, that is، امزح، it is an euphemistic translation of the ST word ‘fuck’, which sounds strikingly rude.

4d. Yeah, keep walking, bitch!

As seen in the example above, the ST word “bitch” was translated into ئلا، يا بitches. Although, the subtitler rendered the word literally, this does not sound as rude as the ST. The ST word is always used as a swear word to describe a woman who behaves unpleasantly. However, the translator maintained the denotative meaning and omitted the reflected meaning of the word. In Arabic, the word 'pitch' can be used for both men and women. There is a wide range of such words in spoken Arabic depending on the geographical dialect and local culture and not only one word

4e. 00:37:12,000 --> 00:37:12,960
Go on, fetch, dog.

As seen in the above example, the ST word “dog” was subtitled to وحش (boy). The subtitler opted to translate the ST word into a different word that can partially convey the message of the ST without wounding the feelings of the audience. To convey the intended meaning of the ST word ‘dog’, which might in this context implies violence, the translator added a phrase that does not exist in the ST explicitly, that is، وحش، وحش which sounds savage/aggressive. This, however, seems to be helpful to maintain the flow of actions in the movie.

4f. 00:37:04,450 --> 00:37:06,960
FUCK you, rookie!

As seen in the above example, the ST word “fucking” was rendered euphemistically as بالله انتو. This might be throughout the movie.

4g. 00:37:04,450 --> 00:37:06,960
Fucking on their felling

As seen in the above example, the word ‘fucking’ was rendered euphemistically as بالله انتو. This might be throughout the movie.

4h. I’m the zigzag man. Who the fuck are you?

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Table 4. Quality assessment for generalization strategy.

| English source text | The subtitle | Subtitling strategy | Functional equivalence | Acceptability | Readability |
|---------------------|--------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| 3a. That's classic brick-Pack Mexican | I will let the guys of the neighborhood use your girlfriend | Generalization | 0.25 | 0 | 0 |

Table 5. The quality assessment for the euphemistic strategy-related expressions and words.

| English source text | The subtitle | Subtitling strategy | Functional equivalence | Acceptability | Readability |
|---------------------|--------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| 4a. No shit. So, uh, | لئيحة مغولة | Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression | 1 | 0.5 | 0.25 |
| 4b. Yep. Are like a pig. | Bushi, لو كنت أكلت أكلًا غريبًا | Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression | 1 | 0 | 0.25 |
| 4c. Shut the fuck up, and just wait. | إغري وأنتظر | Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression | 1 | 0 | 0.25 |
| 4d. Yeah, keep walking, bitch! | أمست مريءة الصوت وนานاين | Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression | 0 | 0.25 | 0.25 |
| 4e. Go on, fetch, dog. | اذهب إلى وأنا أ окруح، يا ولف | Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression | 0.5 | 0 | 0.25 |
| 4f. Fuck you, rookie! | لا أريد أن أرى دمك، يا لابيض | Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression | 0 | 0 | 0.25 |
| 4g. Fucking on their felling | الأسرة، تكلم، يا لابيض | Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 4h. I'm the zigzag man. | أنا ذو الرأس عين أفاذ، سبق الرجاء؟ | Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 4i. Let the garbage men handle the garbage. | دعا الرجال الذين لديهم مهنة معهم | Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 4j. Civil rights violating motherfuckers! | نزولا من حقوق الإنسان الذين لديهم مهنة معهم | Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 4k. Man, I don't sell that | يا تاجرا، لا أبيع ذلك | Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression | 0 | 0 | 0.25 |
| 4l. Civil rights violating | حقوق الإنسان الذين لديهم مهنة معهم | Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 4m. You pay the rent | دفع الأجر | Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 4n. Run a train on your girlfriend | سأحمل教你 | Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 4o. Get your big ass down! | اذهبbers | Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression | 0 | 0 | 0 |

4l. Civil rights violating
handle the garbage.

4i. Let the garbage men
handle the garbage.

4f. 'Fuck you, rookie! '

4k. Man, I don't sell that
thing.

4l. Civil rights violating

motherfuckers!

4m. You pay the rent

4n. Run a train on your girlfriend

4o. Get your big ass down!

4l. Civil rights violating

motherfuckers!

4m. You pay the rent
In example 5a, the subtitler translated the idiom literally. The subtitler chose to translate the ST expression kind of literally.

5a. Hell is for me

In example 6a, the subtitler omitted the ST word ‘shit’, which in this context refers to eyes. It is quite clear in your eyes.

6a. Please, shut up

As seen in above examples, the ST word ‘damn’ was omitted in all the Arabic subtitles because it is a taboo. This omission, however, doesn’t seem to impact the intended meaning.

6d. Get the fuck out of my car

As seen in example 5c, the ST phrasal verb ‘shut up’ was subtitled literally to Arabic. This is a literal direct translation, as the ST and the TT words sound functionally and lexically equivalent.

5c. Shut up!

Table 6. The quality assessment of the directly translated words/terms.

| English ST | The subtitle | Subtitling strategy | Functional equivalence | Acceptability | Readability |
|------------|--------------|---------------------|------------------------|--------------|------------|
| 5a. Hell if I am. | جحيم من نسيمتي | Direct translation | 0 | 0 | 0.25 |
| 5b. You fucking pig! | أهو الذئب الرأسي! | Direct translation | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 5c. Shit! | شيت | Direct translation | 0 | 0 | 0.25 |
| 5d. Damn right I trust him. | اللبنة عن حق يحتمه | Direct translation | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 5e. Saving the god damn world! | حماية الله اللائق | Direct translation | 0 | 0 | 0.25 |
| 5f. This is my dog’s house. | هذا منزل البكل | Direct translation | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 5g. Please, shut up. | يمتعوك إخّر | Direct translation | 0 | 0 | 0.25 |
| 5h. Yeah, time to get my swerve on her | هنا الوقت للهروب | Direct translation | 0 | 0 | 0 |

8. Omission

Omission is one of the strategies used to subtithe some taboo and swear expressions. In the movie, the subtitler decided to delete some ST words/phrases and he sometimes compensate for them. Examples of such a strategy use are provided below.

6a. 00:11:41,770 --> 00:11:42,770 The shit is coming out of your eyes.

6b. 00:10:33,133 --> 00:10:37,429

Shit, man. You going to teach me that old school,

6c. 00:18:24,950 --> 00:18:25,500

You want to protect this accursed world

6d. 00:09:34,640 --> 00:09:35,640

Get out of my car

6e. 00:26:53,010 --> 00:26:55,010

I saw something. Stop the fuck car!

6f. 00:28:18,090 --> 00:28:20,100

You too, fuck white boy!

6g. 00:44:50,460 --> 00:44:51,960

Where is your back-up?

6h. 00:21:52,210 --> 00:21:54,210

Back to the world, dog.
Rendering informal language formal

This strategy was proposed by Abdelaal (2019), whereby he found that subtitlers render informal language formally. Many swear and taboo words were formally subtitled to make them accessible and comprehensible to the vast majority audience in the Arab world. Rendering informal language formal also implicates a euphemistic rendition. Arabic formal language tends to be more euphemistic than informal language. Examples of such a strategy use are discussed below.

7a. 00:04:43,220 --> 00:04:46,220
No. Hell, no, you won’t.
You fucked that up.

7b. 00:05:35,270 --> 00:05:39,280
It’s 90% bullshit, but it’s entertaining.

7c. 00:07:38,400 --> 00:07:39,900
You tapped that ass, didn’t you?

Table 7. Quality assessment for omission strategy translated words.

| English ST | The subtitle | Subtitling strategy | Functional equivalence | Acceptability | Readability |
|-----------|--------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| 6a. The shit is coming out of your eyes. | من فازت دا في النتائج | Omission | 0.00 | 0.25 | 0.00 |
| 6b. Shit, man. You going to teach me that old school | وضحني يا عجوز | Omission | 0.00 | 0.25 | 0.00 |
| 6c. No shit. So, uh, she calls our supervisor | ما حاجة تعرف، ماهو | Omission | 0.00 | 0.25 | 0.00 |
| 6d. Get the fuck out of my car. | شفع في سيارتي | Omission | 0.00 | 0.25 | 0.00 |
| 6e. I saw something. Stop the fucking car! | أوقف السيارة! للأسف، لم يقم شريفًا | Omission | 0.00 | 0.25 | 0.00 |
| 6f. You, too, fucking white boy! | أنت أيضًا يا الأبيض | Omission | 0.00 | 0.25 | 0.00 |
| 6g. Back to the world, dog. | في موطنا، وحش | Omission | 0.00 | 0.25 | 0.00 |
| 6h. Didn’t find a damn thing. | لم إد أي شيء | Omission | 0.00 | 0.25 | 0.00 |
| 6i. My fucking money back, motherfucker. | أتمنى ألا يكون أي شيء | Omission | 0.00 | 0.25 | 0.00 |
| 6j. Didn’t find a damn thing. | لم إد أي شيء | Omission | 0.00 | 0.25 | 0.00 |
| 6k. My fucking money back, motherfucker. | أتمنى ألا يكون أي شيء | Omission | 0.00 | 0.25 | 0.00 |

Table 8. Quality assessment for subtitles where formal language was used to render informal language.

| English ST | The subtitle | Subtitling strategy | Functional equivalence | Acceptability | Readability |
|-----------|--------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| 7a. 00:04:43,220 --> 00:04:46,220 | اللبخة، لم تتفائل لور النفس علوك الدعوة | Rendering Informal language formal | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 7b. 00:05:35,270 --> 00:05:39,280 | اللبخة، لم تتفائل لور النفس علوك الدعوة | Rendering Informal language formal | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| 7c. 00:07:38,400 --> 00:07:39,900 | اللبخة، لم تتفائل لور النفس علوك الدعوة | Rendering Informal language formal | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |

As seen in the examples above, the ST word ‘dog’ was omitted in the Arabic subtitles. Quality assessment for directly translated words is provided in the table below (see Table 7). As seen in the table above, all the subtitles were of good quality. In total, rendering the ST words euphemistically and rendering informal language formal seem to overlap when it comes to translating swear and taboo words and expressions (see Table 8). As seen in the examples above, the ST words ‘damn’ and ‘motherfucker’ were omitted in the Arabic subtitles. Quality assessment for directly translated words is provided in the table below (see Table 7). As seen in the table above, all the subtitles were of good quality. In total, rendering the ST words euphemistically and rendering informal language formal seem to overlap when it comes to translating swear and taboo words and expressions (see Table 8). As seen in the examples above, the ST words ‘damn’ and ‘motherfucker’ were omitted in the Arabic subtitles. Quality assessment for directly translated words is provided in the table below (see Table 7). As seen in the table above, all the subtitles were of good quality. In total, rendering the ST words euphemistically and rendering informal language formal seem to overlap when it comes to translating swear and taboo words and expressions (see Table 8).
also concludes that some subtitling strategies overlap. For example, rendering informal language formal sometimes it is done for a euphemistic purpose, and other times for the purpose of using a language understandable by everyone.

10. Conclusion

This study aimed to identify subtitling strategies of swear and taboo words in the American movie entitled “Training Day,” and to provide quality assessment for these subtitles. For this purpose, the data was collected from the movie and were analyzed using Pedersen’s (2005, 2011) modified typology proposed by Abdelaal (2019) of subtitling strategies and Pedersen’s quality assessment model. The results of the study illustrate that all the strategies proposed by Pedersen and those proposed by Abdelaal were used in subtitling the selected words and expressions. However, it was found that omission and euphemistic translation are the most common strategies used by the subtitler. Omission was used because of cultural constraints, as the translator observed the target culture constraints that sometimes make it difficult to render some swear and taboo words into Arabic, especially those which are perceived as very pejorative and unacceptable. These terms include expressions related to sex, excretion and others. However, in some cases the translator opted to render those pejorative sex and excretion related words into English to maintain the spirit of the ST which trags young people and teenagers. Another reason for adopting the omission strategy is economical, i.e. the translator wants to save space on the screen which allows limited number of characters. One more reason for using omission as a translation strategy is that some swear and taboo words collocate in English but they do not collocate in Arabic. Omission as a strategy can be appropriate if the translator did not create a kind of vacuum on the screen that hampers the viewers from enjoying the movie. The second most common strategy is euphemistic translation, which is quite expected; the Arab society is conservative and therefore some swear and taboo words sound super offensive. To avoid such subtle offensiveness and rudeness, the translator opted to render many swear and taboo words euphemistically. I think this strategy is acceptable as long as it does not affect the essence of meaning. However, one problem with such a strategy is that it might result in mismatch between the actors’ facial expressions and body gestures on one side and the subtitles. Put clearer, the body gestures and facial expressions may convey anger and rudeness which is not reflected in the subtitles.

The quality assessment showed that most subtitles are of good quality. It is suggested that Pedersen’s Model of quality assessment needs to be revised. The model provides quantitative assessment, but the qualitative assessment is required as well. Previous studies on subtitling swear words and taboo expressions are still lacking. A model that regulates the strategies used in subtitling from Arabic into English is also needed.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Noureldin Mohamed Abdelaal: Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.
Amani Al Sarhani: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments.

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Data included in article/supplementary material/referenced in article.

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Additional information

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