

A Brief Analyses of Subtitle Translation Errors: “The Messiah” as a case study

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Abstract:

This paper tries to examine a subtitling-related problem that subtitling translators may encounter with religious or cultural phrases or names. One of the most challenging jobs for all translators is how to reproduce subtitled language features into culturally accepted terms and words in the (TL). The study focuses on subtitling from English – Arabic, as illustrated by the translation of the Netflix series: “Messiah” . It reveals that translations face several ideological and cultural aspects that impact subtitles' choice and deleterious effect on a message. The paper concludes some informative implications that will hopefully help subtitling translators deal with the problems in question.

Keywords: audiovisual translation, subtitling, translator’s competence, cultural terms, religious beliefs.

تحليل موجز لأخطاء ترجمة الحاشية السينمائية : مسلسل "المسيح" أنموذجاً
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ملخص البحث:

يحاول هذا البحث دراسة مشكلة متعلقة بترجمة الحاشية السينمائية والتي ربما يواجهها المترجمون في ترجمة عبارات أو أسماء دينية أو ثقافية. حيث ان من أصعب الوظائف التي يواجهها المترجمين تتركز في كيفية نقل صفات اللغة المترجمة إلى مصطلحات وكلمات مقبولة ثقافياً في اللغة الهدف. (TL) وقد اظهرت دراسة ترجمة مسلسل "المسيح" / Messiah من الانجليزية الى العربية أم المترجم يواجه العديد من التأثيرات الإيديولوجية والثقافية التي تؤثر على اختياره للترجمة وتأثيرها الضار على المعنى الذي يحمله النص الاصيل. ويختتم البحث ببعض العوامل التي من المؤمل أن تساعد المترجمين على التعامل مع مشاكل الترجمة السمعية البصرية.

كلمات مفتاحية: الترجمة السمعية البصرية ، ترجمة الحاشية السينمائية ، كفاءة المترجم ، المصطلحات الثقافية ، المعتقدات الدينية .

1-Introduction

The translation process is the transmission of meaning of a text into another language in the manner the writer intended in the text. The aim is to translate the text's ideas in the (SL) to readers of the (TL) through a target text with the same message and effect.

According to Toury, "there is no doubt that putting forward; even producing a text as if it were a translation always involves an individual decision. However, such a decision will inevitably have been made within a particular cultural setup, which is either conducive to pseudo-translating or else may hinder recourse." (Toury, 2005, p8) The translator should know the origin of words and expressions because languages express reality in different ways.

Additionally, there are technical restrictions frequently involved in the process of subtitling. A translator can use notes in explaining to the viewer what the meaning, but the subtitler should make sure that the translated text goes in coordination with codes of good subtitling.

According to Thawabteh, "The distinction between (Audiovisual Translation) AVT and other forms of translation (e.g., literary translation) is that fidelity is determined by constraints within the ambit of words or languages (Thawabteh,2010,p3). AVT tilts towards 'communicative effectiveness' the target audience is often after. Besides, subtitling is more complicated and demanding as Karamitroglou (2000: 104) neatly states: "the number of possible audiovisual translation problems is endless and a list that would account for each one of them can never be finite."

Subsequently, many phrases are a product of a specific civilization; the meaning and expressions are deeply-rooted in the precise cultural background that translators are aiming to transfer to the TL. According to Nida (1994):

"the fact that all languages exhibit so many structural similarities guarantees the potential for effective interlingual communication" though to significant degree languages are viewed as 'rule governed,' they are also 'rule defying,' or perhaps more accurately stated, they are 'rule stretching' in that analogies within languages can always be pushed into unused, nearby areas (P.150)"

Yule (1985, p.5), states that individuals are connected to the culture al aspects which ought to be part of translating, such as, their ethnic background or source. Newmark (1988) sees that the translation problems are because of cultural differences between the SL and TL. He does not regard language as a component or feature of culture. "Language contains all kinds of cultural deposits, in the grammar, forms of address, as well as the lexis which are not taken account of in universals or translation." The

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more precise the language, the more it becomes rooted in its culture, leading to translation problems.

Cultural terms and ideas are commonly assumed to pose the most challenging problem in interpretation. This problem is studied repeatedly. One of the most challenging tasks for all translators is to render culturally – bound elements in subtitles into a foreign language.

Some translators might get affected by personal ideas and perceptions, which can be a set of morals, traditions, and principles that form his/her behavioral approach to translation. Those might be a product of society or religion. (Kotze & Crots, 2014,p.2).

Religion is usually the controlling power of many human perceptions in different cultures; it is an ideology that underlines the values, ideas, and attitudes of people. Religious beliefs shape the behavioral approach to political, economic, social and cultural activities of an individual or society.

The translator in the Arab/Islamic culture knows that he/she is obliged to translate local customs and take some stance concerning its particular components. For instance, he/she has to keep in mind while translating Islamic texts and ethics that are acceptable in that culture. Translators know that they have to emphasize the effect on cultural products and beliefs.

It is useful to recognize the psychology of ideology and religion because there are ideological and religious imperatives. A shared ideology or religion is a practical way for like-minded people to find each other and work together to achieve a shared aim. Hence, it is crucial to identify the ideological/ religious elements that affect the translation process.

When it comes to people's ideology, whether religious or social ideas, the matter is in the context; it is not whether some people are right or wrong, but why they embrace so stubbornly a point of view so as not to eagerly subject to constant inspection. An ideology or religion is likely one of a person's free will and ideas can give an analysis and re-examination of convincing signs of other views. They are more likely to analyze other societies' social relations and complications, as well as how to translate those ideas. Translators who understand other ideologies are more likely to be extremely accepting of other world views as some religions, and political ideas might explicitly teach.

2-Subtitling:

Subtitling is a "form of translation known the world over, and yet a general audience's knowledge is limited to the subtitles' bare functionality, preferably actualized in as invisible a way as possible" (Bannon, 2009, as cited in DiGiovanni 2016,p.2). It is the turning of language delivered orally into a written text, appearing on-screen simultaneously with the dialogues, which remain fully audible. Thus, subtitling performs the twofold task of adding a communication channel and ensuring the co-existence of two languages. Subtitling is a highly complex, multifarious activity. It implies several stages and it requires several skills, amongst which are linguistic and cultural competencies. Moreover, subtitling demands skills and competencies that are activated simultaneously and with an equal degree of awareness.

Translation studies make it possible for other disciplines to emerge and even flourish into an area of study worthy of research in its own right. Audiovisual Translation is a case in point. The topic has attracted the attention of translation academics and experts in the past few years. Borghetti discusses how subtitling is essential to students of translation because of the results of the types of intercultural learning through subtitles and the Audiovisual Translation. The advantages linked with the use of subtitled audiovisual materials are several, and the researcher adds that it engages a broad range of productive abilities such as spelling, writing, and summarizing. It helps develop textual and translation skills; encourages students to choose sufficient semantic and pragmatic reformulation over word-for-word translation pro to space and time limitations; and it lends itself to an additional series of micro-activities such as note-taking, extensive and intensive listening (Borghetti ,2011,P.112).

Subtitling is a challenge to experts who try to satisfy the viewers of audiovisual translation in developed communication and equipment. Subtitles are "characteristically used to carry interlingua translation when foreign-language films are shown in cinemas or on television with the original soundtrack. Open interlingua subtitles are used on many foreign language videos, as subtitling usually proves a much cheaper option than dubbing" (O'Connell, 2007, p.126).

Interpreters need to control the subtitles so that the meaning is as close to the SL as possible to the TL viewers. They also have to reproduce the written language of the subtitles. The subtitling process today includes several actions. It involves promoting and marking the transcript or the dialogue list conferring to when subtitles start and end, then the length is designed to the subtitles conferring to the prompting times of each setting. At that point, it is decoded using the dialogue listed for the TL viewers.

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Gottlib suggests that the subtitling procedures which are transcripts of film or TV dialogue should be accessible immediately on the screen. He states that "cinema subtitlers normally work from paper to paper, translating dialogue from a post-production script, the end product being a list of subtitles; these subtitles are then transferred onto the film by others" (Gottlib, 1998, 36).

In order to convert the meaning effectively and naturally into TL, the translator should listen thoughtfully, and they should identify and absorb the full content of the program/film. They should also view the screen for any visual clues where the language might give a meaningful context. We can also say that to create an easy-to-read subtitle, which allows the viewer to understand the program's meaning as efficiently as possible, should evaluate translation with other translators and discuss the choices made in addition to linguistic and technical skills subtitling demands a good ability in IT skills as well.

Translators have to examine and investigate the translation problems he/she face when rendering a text to an Arab/Muslim culture. They should look at the features in translating subtitles, calling them "translation crisis point." (Pedersen 2007; 2008), i.e. points in translation where the translator has to abandon his or her automated processes and resort to strategic behavior. Pedersen states that there are "turning points, at which the translators have to make active decisions" (Pedersen, 2005, p10) He lists seven parameters that can influence the translator when he/she subtitles: Transculturality, Extratextuality, Centrality of Reference, Intersemiotic Redundancy, Co-text, Media-specific Constrains, and Paratextual Considerations. In his paper, he examines the subtitling process and strategies undertaken to solve any culture-bound translation problems and the cultural items relating to the ECRs expressions related to films and TV programs in the Scandinavian countries. He explains further that it does not necessarily mean that the translator is consciously aware of what choices they make, as part of this process may be internalized and subconscious. In the case where strategies combine; the subtitlers may not be aware that they have used more than one strategy (Pedersen, 2005, P.9) Pederson finds that "finally it is proposed that it is unlikely that a truly unsolvable culture-bound translation problem would exist." (Pedersen, 2005, P.16)

3-The Messiah*

The "Messiah" is an American Netflix television show "about a CIA officer named Eva Geller's investigation of a man receiving attention from around the world for claiming to be a divine entity. His followers believe he can create miracles, and his critics allege he is a con artist." (Netflix Official Site, Jan 3, 2020). The show received different opinions worldwide, some critics were impressed with the writing in the first episode, but many viewers were bothered by the rest of the show where they noticed how bad the Arabic accents were. In the show, for instance, Syrian characters speak with Lebanese and Moroccan accents and even worse, some

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characters speak literary Arabic /Fusha (classical Arabic). It would have been more understandable if all actors spoke in a Levantine dialect, but the mixed northern African, Egyptian, and Lebanese accents, many agree, were a terrible choice by the program's makers. We all got to know that Netflix and other English speaking networks and shows have no regard towards Arabs and Arabic-speaking viewers. In general, American movies usually have minimal regard for accuracy when representing foreign languages or non-American people on screen. Most of the writers or makers of television programs or films assume the audience will not notice, or just do not care.

The trailer received negative reception from some Muslim audiences, and in December 2019, it was announced in a press conference that The Royal Film Commission of Jordan requested Netflix to refrain streaming Messiah in the country due to the provocative subject matter and controversial religious content covered in the series.(Mahjouri, 2019). "Jordan's Royal Film Commission Does Not Want 'Messiah' Streamed In The Country"(Andreeva,2019). Particular anger has been caused over Dehbi's character, whose name is similar to the evil figure in Islamic eschatology called Al-Masih ad-Dajjal, and was branded a liar, compared to the Antichrist.

The storyteller, in this case, Netflix, should work for the viewer, and of course, translating things is hard because it is not just words that make up a language. Culture & body language is a large part. Translators must realize that when producing the subtitles on a foreign show or film, it is still missing something, especially if they have no understanding of the target culture.

4- Aim of the study

All translators know how hard it is to convey subtitled language features into culturally recognized terms in the TL. Connotations lie in expressions from cultural backgrounds of texts, or inside the target cultural text. The objective of this research is to investigate the problems that translators face when they subtitle culturally-bound expressions from English into Arabic.

To accomplish the objectives of the study, we attempt to question why some translators face a problem in the rendering of some language expressions within cultural context when subtitling from English into Arabic.

5. Justification of the research

We cannot find sufficient papers and studies regarding rendering expressions in the translation of subtitles within a cultural context in the Arab world. In this study, the aim is to understand this. Furthermore, there are no secure ethics for reading this sort of cultural expression, which leads to confusion in distinguishing them from the TL viewers. This study emphasizes the most distinguished and essential standards that subtitlers use.

6. Data discussion and analysis

6.1 Discussion

This section is divided into sub-sections, each with different types of names in the script from "Messiah." The last part will be devoted to other cultural references.

The collection of different types of names, especially names with their underlying meanings, can be a problematic issue for translators. This section will focus on the hidden meanings of the names. Nevertheless, such associations cannot be easily perceived by audiences since they are hidden very creatively. Thus, these hidden references become a tricky task and especially more challenging to convey into other languages/cultures. As referred to earlier, it is undeniable that the Arab audience who poses a different cultural and linguistic knowledge cannot have the same connotations. Hence, information about names found in the series in question is analyzed.

Names can cause problems in the translation process of controversial/religious texts. The series is a good example and it offers rich material for those interested in comparing interlingua subtitles and discussing how expert translators deal with all these culturally challenging features. The writers of the series used names full of hidden connotations, wordplay, history, and myths. A repeatedly asked question to the author is about the origins of all the names in the series.

The most striking fact is the high frequency of names of people (and animals!) Most characters have a first name, what makes the series unique, controversial, and exciting is that the names included are especially exclusive. The names have Christian and Jewish origins, since the author of the series targeted an English-speaking audience, some of the names are very conventional and familiar to them. Most of the names are easily understood by English speaking audience. However, the connotative meanings that can be deduced from such names might not be familiar for the people in the west as they might be to Arab/Muslim in particular. Therefore, they(the names) do not have the same access to the same associations as those made in the source text because the target audience has different cultural backgrounds and knowledge. Thus, the subtitle translator has to be very precise.

Below are all the names in the series that have an equivalent in Arabic but their translation might be considered sensitive if translated in to Arabic/Muslim viewers.

Aviram : This is a a boy's name of Hebrew origin, the meaning of is "my father is mighty".(sheknows,2019). In the show, he is the Israeli/Mossad interrogator.

Eva : is a female given name, the Latinate counterpart of English Eve, derived from a Hebrew name meaning "life" or "living one". It can also mean full of life or mother of life. It is the standard biblical form of Eve in many European languages. In the show the name is given to the good American CIA agent (sheknows,2019)

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Rebecca : a "Hebrew name Rivqah" (behindthename,2020) in Arabic it is رفقة from an unattested root probably meaning "join, tie, snare". This is the name of the wife of Isaac and the mother of Esau and Jacob in the Old Testament. It came into use as a Christian name after the Protestant Reformation, and it was popular with the Puritans in the 17th century.

The character with the name Rebecca is a troubled teenager

Miriam: a Hebrew name meaning "Rebellious... in the Old Testament, Miriam was the sister of Moses and Aaron". (sheknows,2019)

Jibril :The name Jibril is an Arabic origin meaning : Archangel. (sheknows,2019)

Samson: A Hebrew name meaning in Arabic (شمشون). In the series, it is the name given to the dog character .In Hebrew, it means "Sun child; bright sun". In the Old Testament, Samson's great strength came from his long hair. He was seduced by Delilah, who cut his hair off, thereby destroying his strength)

There are many personal names presented in most of them relate to main characters that play an essential role in the series. They often provide more information about characters' traits, i.e., at times, the connotative meaning of a name is explicit, and sometimes particular background information is required so that the name can be understood. The names also have an impact on the story. It is worth reminding that the names above are not the only names in the series, but they have been chosen in this analysis because of their significance.

6.2 –Analysis:

In this analysis, there are chosen excerpts from the **Messiah**, where the subtitles did not render the proper meaning because of his/her ideas or beliefs:

Example 1:

During a storm that hits Damascus the narrator describes the storm as:

- "A storm of biblical proportions"

The Arabic subtitle is:

-غير مسبوقه القوة

This is the wrong translation, and the translator could not render it into the literal meaning which is:

"عاصفة ذات أبعاد توراتية"

The aim of this phrase in the original script is to give the viewer that it was a miracle that happened because of the presence of the "Messiah".

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Example 2:

- The name of the series "Messiah" is translated through the episode into different lexical items in Arabic. In one scene, it is shown that the Arab crowd chanting (المسيح...), whereas the translator of the subtitles in Arabic is (المخلص...المخلص).

- "Maseh in Arabic means the Messiah".

The subtitles in Arabic is "المسيح في العربي تعني المخلص"

In the above example the translator explained the meaning in the spoken dialogue that the original script wanted to convey to the viewers.

- In a different scene "Jibril", a Syrian boy asks his friend:

(The script in English) states that, "هو عيسى المنتظر"

While the Arabic subtitle is , "إنه المخلص"

In this example the meaning is in Arabic but the translator used "المخلص" instead. The translator did not want to say that this is عيسى as this can be a sensitive subject to Arabic/Muslim viewers.

- In this spoken dialogue the Reverend states, "I haven't seen al-masih but when I see him I will know because I've seen his eyes". The Arabic subtitle :

- "لم ارى المخلص بعد، لكن عندما اراه ساعرف لأنني رأيت عيون الرب"

- "The ACLU has stepped up to defend Mr.Messea". In the same scene an Arabic speaking narrators says:

- "مع بدأ البطل الشعبي السياسي واللاجئ السوري .. السيد المسيح"

The Arabic subtitle is,

"مع تطوع الاتحاد الامريكي للحريات المدنية للدفاع عن السيد المسيح"

In the sentences bellow, it is clear the translator faced a problem in the translation of the word (Messiah). The translator/s encountered a problem in the transfer of meaning of the word because of a conflict with this sense of faith and / personal religious ideas.

- In this scene, Jibril says in the Arabic spoken dialogue:

" هو عيسى المنتظر "

The English subtitle is: "He is a returned, Al- Messiah"

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The Arabic subtitle is:

"إنه عيسى المنتظر...المخلص"

In the translations above the translator rendered the text as it is in the original, he/she did no change the words. Al-Messiah in Arabic does refer to Christ/or to Christianity.

However in the next example there is clearly a conflict with the translator/s beliefs:

- "I haven't seen al messiah yet but when I see him I'll know I've seen the eyes of **god**"

The Arabic subtitle is:

"لم ارى المخلص بعد، لكن...لكن عندما اراه سأعرف لاني رأيت عيون الرب"

In the spoken dialogue sentence above, clearly the words might contradict the beliefs with the Arabic/Muslim viewers. The subtitle did not translate Messiah into المسيح, also god was translated into الرب.

All the above examples show that the translator/s could not or would not translate the "Massieh" into Arabic without falling into contradictions and personal clashes with the real meaning of the word as well as what the writers of the series wanted to present to the viewers.

Example 3:

In this example the reporter announces, "It's been called the hoax of the century, or maybe the millennium. The man they call the messiah is mortal"

The Arabic subtitle is:

"يسمونه مقلب القرن، او ربما الألفية.الرجل الذي يدعونه المخلص فان"

The translator rendered (Messiah) into (المخلص فان.) The translator did not translate it to المسيح فان, which would be a sensitive translation to viewers.

Example 4:

The Israeli interrogator asks, "Where are you from?", The messiah replies, "I'm with God". Here the translator used the word "الرب", this is due to the sensitivity of the word "God" and translating it into Arabic to a Muslim culture.

In this sentence, the interrogator tells him, "Why don't you take your f.....god and stick him up you're f.....". It is clear that translating such a sentence into Arabic

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would be considered blasphemous and can cause problems to the translator. The translator chose to render the sentence as:

"لمذا لا تذهب الى الجحيم ايها المؤمن"

Example 5:

-In another scene the boy asks the messiah, in Arabic:

"انت بتخدم الله؟"

The English subtitle on the Netflix scripts reads: "Do you serve **God**?"

But the Arabic translator conveys the sentence as:

"أنت بتخدم الرب؟"

The conversation above would cause viewers in Arabic/Muslim societies to question the meaning. Viewers might think who is he to ask such a question?

-The subtitle translates (الله) into (God) because the meaning of the conversation might not offend Muslim viewers:

The Messiah talking in Arabic,

"انا هون لأقول لكم ترموا افتراضاتكم عن الله"

The subtitles in English: " I'm here to tell you to throw away your assumptions about **God**"

Whereas the Arabic translator translates the sentence:

"جئت لنصحكم بترك افتراضاتكم المسبقة عن الله"

-In this conversation, the translation switched to translating god into رب because it's a sensitive issue to the target audience.

The English Netflix subtitle is : "He's talking to God"

The Arabic speaking character is talking in slang saying:

"بيحكي مع الله"

The Arabic translator renders the phrase into standard Arabic as:

"يتحدث مع الرب"

Example 6:

In this example:

“This viral video appears to show the miracle man at temple mount in Jerusalem”.

The Arabic text is:

"هذا المقطع المصور واسع الانتشار يظهر فيه المخلص في المسجد الأقصى"

(**Temple mount**) is (جبل المعبد), the subtitles rendered it to (المسجد الأقصى); and (**miracle man**) which in Arabic means (رجل المعجزات) is rendered to (المخلص)

7-Conclusions:

The most significant result is that the translators appeared to assume a useful role by understanding and assessing the material to make it accessible to Arabic/Muslim. Programs and shows like the "Messiah" cannot be presented to the Middle East audience without keeping in mind the political implications behind such shows. Cultural and historical awareness can be gained as a result of the documentary type programs' content. These paper findings displayed how translating ideas and personal cultural beliefs is one of the most onerous responsibilities that specialized interpreters/translators face when they have no counterparts in the TL. The process itself should consider adopting top significances such as text-typology to ensure the version of cultural fundamentals.

The examples above show that translators will convert the source dialogue's cultural models according to our formal acceptance using techniques such as synonyms to substitute elements that will/or might offend the target audience's culture.

8-Recommendations:

The translator should seek functional equivalence to be sure that the target audiences understand the message as in the original text.

Furthermore, to enhance studies about subtitling additional, studies should be commenced regarding the retranslations of such television programs from a diachronic viewpoint. These subtitle translations would significantly shed light on linguistic use changes and additional language criteria while still keeping the source text's loyalty. Hence, there is certainly the possibility for additional effort on this topic, as this type of research will help in subtitling practice.

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Notes:

* "الماشياح" أو "المسيا" تلفظ باللغة العبرية

In Hebrew, the Messiah is often referred to as מֶלֶךְ הַמְּשִׁיחַ (Meleḵ ha-Mašīaḥ in the Tiberian vocalization, pronounced ['meleχ hama'ʃiaħ], literally meaning "the Anointed King".Messiah/Mashiah

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