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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Subtitling Research in the Arab World: Review Article

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| ABSTRACT

This article outlines the most important trends in subtitling research in the Arab World. Despite its importance, immediacy of reception and the broad audience subtitles reach, academia has lagged for decades and failed to cope with the growing subtitling industry, missing great opportunities for research, practice as well as the teaching of subtitling in institutions of higher education. However, a good number of subtitling practitioners and academics have realized this wide gap in the research and started to carry out serious projects to investigate this area. This article reviews the current body of literature that spans the past twenty years and highlights the major areas of research as well as the gaps that still exist. This review has found out that the major areas that have been covered so far include technical aspects of subtitling; linguistic difficulties (lexical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, etc.); rhetorical aspects (such as euphemism, humor and word play); and cultural appropriateness (in relation to censorship to hide swearwords and obscenities as well as religious connotations, taboos, idioms, etc.). Many of these studies have suggested translation strategies to address these challenges (e.g., omissions, paraphrase, modulation, adaptation and transcreation). However, the article also points out some gaps in the research such as the relevance of subtitling to some translation theories and linguistic models like the Interpretive Theory of Translation (ITT), Relevance Theory, Accommodation Theory, Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), Grice's Cooperative Principle and Brondeel's Model. There is also a huge gap in accessibility studies which aim to make audiovisual material accessible to people with sensory (visual or aural) disabilities. Additionally, the usefulness of subtitling to foreign language teaching and learning has not been adequately researched in Arab universities. Therefore, these areas merit the attention of researchers in the future.

| KEYWORDS

Subtitling, Audiovisual translation, screen translation, the Functional Approach, Translation theory.

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### 1. Introduction

Subtitles are the written translation of the dialog spoken by actors in movies, guests in TV programs or people in any audiovisual material. This translation appears in successive segments of one or two lines at the bottom of the screen, and they flash in and out of the screen at an average rate of two to six seconds as the speaker(s) produce(s) new utterances. Subtitles are synchronized to each utterance's start and end points in the sense that a subtitle appears on the screen when a speaker starts a new utterance or resumes an utterance after a pause, and it vanishes when the speaker finishes an utterance or pauses to breathe. The technical arrangement which helps this process happen usually takes place prior to translation when another specialist or technician—known as the time-coder—performs the time-coding or cueing in which s/he uses specialized software to divide the translation file into smaller slots known as cells. Each cell corresponds to an utterance and is proportionate to it in terms of length and duration which usually extends from two to six seconds. It is in these slots or cells that subtitlers work later and 'fill' them with the translation of the utterances. When the work is finalized and the program is broadcast, the translation segments appear on the screen one

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after the other (with very short intervals in between) in what is known as subtitles. Because the subtitles are 'fleeting' and cannot be backtracked (on the TV), viewers have to read quickly to understand the message and enjoy other parts of the film, e.g., the images and action. To help them do so, subtitles have to be as short and condensed as possible. All these technical complexities have put off translation scholars from conducting research in this area, dismissing it as distorted translation or not translation at all. Luckily, the earliest writings in the field have been published by professionals who paved the way for further studies and gave insights to subsequent research.

## **2. Mapping out the Current Scene**

Ahmad Khuddru is among the earliest Arab scholars and professionals who wrote on subtitling. In his 2000 article "Subtitling in Arabic", he discusses the types of subtitling (open versus closed), the audience, censorship, the relationship between Arabic and the target language in subtitling, as well as the common mistakes made when Arabic is the TL. Because we live in the age of mass communication where people have open windows into different cultures, Khuddru iterates, subtitlers should facilitate this communication for the audience by creating "a simple, intelligible, and highly expressive target text, with words and phrases that are globally understood" (2000, p. 32). Therefore, the viewers and their diverse backgrounds (e.g. different age groups, literacy levels, genders, etc.) should be borne in mind when making the translation decisions to make the subtitles as relevant to them as possible. This is one of the most obstinate challenges of subtitling (ibid).

Khuddru also highlights the importance of practicing some censorship by the subtitler. Because cultures are different, some lexical items should not be translated literally, or not translated at all, in order not to offend the target audience. For instance, some words in the SL (English in his case), especially swear words and slang (typical of the spoken discourse of movies) bear "religious connotations or sexual overtones" which are offensive to the Arab target viewership. Therefore, they should be "intentionally overlooked" by the subtitler who should convey the overall meaning, though (pp. 33- 34).

Furthermore, Khuddru calls on subtitlers to use simple language in subtitles: monosyllabic words are preferred to multisyllabic ones; simple sentences are prioritized over "complex sentences that are full of subordinate clauses" (p. 35). Additionally, jargon, unfamiliar lexis and uncommon abbreviations are to be avoided because they frustrate the viewer and demand more time than available to "decipher" the message (ibid). This is a necessity, he contends, because the viewers do not have the luxury to reread the translation as is the case with other forms of text translation (p. 34). He also lists common mistakes that are common in subtitling into Arabic, e.g., misspellings, wrong word order, mishearing an ST word and translating it accordingly (especially numbers) as well as wordy subtitles. Subtitlers can also make the same mistakes that are common in text translation, e.g., errors related to understanding idioms, cultural references, slang as well as grammatical mistakes (pp. 36-37). He draws the attention to some words which are spelled differently in different Arab countries whose appearance on the screen may create confusion on the viewers' part. For instance, the address form **أبلة** (i.e. Miss, Ma'am) is sometimes spelled without the two dots on the final letter **ه**, thus changing the word to **أبله** which means *idiot*. The same applies to the deletion of the two dots underneath the final letter in the proper name **علي** (Ali) turning it to the preposition **على** (on). Failing to observe these minute details can cause confusion for the viewers (p. 33). Although Khuddru's article is so brief, it is a valuable contribution because it presents an early sketch of the main problems of subtitling into Arabic and some practical solutions to them based on his long professional experience in the field. This short article is a basic read for Arab novice professionals and researchers alike.

Mazid (2006) considers the notion that subtitling can be examined as a form of interpreting that involves interaction among different semiotic codes (the transfer of a spoken ST into a written TT). He analyzes some mistakes that are common in the Arabic subtitles of English movies and TV dramas, e.g. literal translation (especially of idioms and proverbs), inattention to the context, offensive language and different levels of formality. Mazid argues that although "a dialogue between spouses in bed in SA [Standard Arabic] is very hard to believe" (p. 84), using Standard Arabic as the TL variety in translating foreign films is the most appropriate and convenient choice for two reasons: first, because, unlike colloquial varieties, it is understood throughout the Arab World; and, second, because the standard renditions of obscenities are more "palatable" than the colloquial counterparts which would be too offensive and flagrant for the Arab viewers to tolerate (p. 94).

Such "obscenities" cannot be subtitled into any variety of colloquial Arabic... for the strong censorship thereon in Arab TV and cinema. Censorship on obscenity and swearing has always existed in every community. In an Arab context, more specifically in Egyptian cinema, the most important areas kept under state censorship are religion, sexuality and politics (Mazid, 2006, p. 95).

In addition, Mazid calls on subtitlers to take the target culture (TC) into consideration when they face obscenities in the source text (ST) even if they will have to compromise faithfulness to the original. "To be honest to the ST under these constraints is a difficult task. Yet, honesty does not seem the most important issue in translating – at least not when rigidly defined" (p. 96). As for other challenges like rendering different levels of formality, incorporating the context and naturalness of expression, Mazid observes

that professional training can help with these areas, urging subtitlers to be more creative and to enhance their mastery of both the SL and TL. Moreover, he underscores the usefulness of watching the movie before starting to work in the translation, and warns against the inefficiency of relying on the script alone since it does not provide the non-verbal codes of the film (e.g. music, scenery, gestures, body language, etc.) which are part and parcel of the audiovisual message (ibid). Mazid's article provides detailed examples of translation challenges in several American films into Arabic. He also offers practical solutions to these challenges that can inspire both novice and experienced subtitlers.

Tammam Alkadi's PhD dissertation (2010) explores the technical, linguistic and cultural challenges of subtitling and dubbing English movies into Arabic and suggests solutions to them. He analyzes the renderings of dialect, swear words and humor in three feature films, one television sitcom and an animation series. Based on the data collected from interviews with professionals and questionnaires from viewers, he concludes that the Functional Approach can help AVT translators to improve their work and produce a "similar effect on the target audience as that which the source text has on its audience" (p. ii). This is a real challenge, he maintains, because

In the Arab culture, which is shaped by Islam, which in turn has a huge impact on its ideology, swearing, religious and sexual taboos cannot be tolerated, especially on screen. They have to be euphemised or even omitted; a thing that may affect the message of the source text when translated into the TC (Alkadi, 2010, p. 3).

In fact, this is the same conclusion drawn by Khuddru (2000) and Mazid (2006) above. From the interviews he conducted with professional subtitlers, Alkadi states that they did not refer to any translation theory or model in their work although they were aware of important concepts like literal translation and context. In the main, translators opt for dynamic equivalence rather than literal translation. He argues that neglecting translation theory and translation models "may result in a disorganised translation and consequently in a loss of the source text's message. Defining the aim of a translation and the way to reach that aim is crucial" (ibid). Reviewing subtitling traditions in Arab, Asian and Western countries, Alkadi lists common translation strategies used to render swear words and obscenities, i.e., omission and euphemization, ascribing this to religious reasons in the Arab World, and to cultural reasons in Russia and Latin America, especially that foul language becomes stronger, and thus more shocking, when it is written than when it is spoken (p. 34).

Apart from swear words, dialect is lost in translation because the subtitles are exclusively in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). However, to close this gap, he suggests adding a brief written introduction at the beginning of the film to explain the dialectal/social differences among the characters. He also contends that TV channels broadcasting subtitled films should conduct surveys and questionnaires among the viewers to guide the translation of AVT material and make the translation "totally audience-oriented" (p. 177).

Alkadi also mentions a set of factors to ensure high-quality subtitles, i.e. "availability of a good dialogue list, good wages, training, editing, the availability of a reference library, and experience of translators" (p. 47). His recommendation of the functional approach stems from its flexibility and comprehensiveness. The functional approach strikes a balance between the ST and the TT, caters for the audience's cultural background, the translation commission, the small details in the texts as well as the general purpose of both texts.

Thawabteh (2011) analyzes the linguistic, cultural and technical difficulties of subtitling a Sky News TV interview with George Galloway, the British politician and broadcaster, from English into Arabic. His data are taken from translations done by graduate students doing their MA in translation studies at Al-Quds University in Palestine. He analyzes the changes that occur in translation to linguistic phenomena (e.g. question tags, exclamations, homophones, idioms, complex ST syntax, collocations, tense and aspect), the difficulties of rendering 'cultural traps' as well as technical issues (font type and size on the screen, ill-segmentation, subtitle background, word spacing, synchronization, and others). Thawabteh reiterates that a competent subtitler should not only be conversant linguistically and culturally, but also technically in order to handle the technical constraints of the software he or she is using (p. 25). Despite these challenges and despite the fact that AVT has been practiced for a long time in the Arab World, he laments the scarcity of serious academic programs and professional training courses to prepare professionals for the market. He blames this shortage on the fact that "AVT is still not recognised as an independent discipline in the Arab World" (p. 27). Therefore, he concludes the article with some pedagogical guidelines to improve the quality of subtitles, and with an open call to design extensive training courses in audiovisual translation to prepare translation students for the expanding AVT market.

In another paper (2012), Thawabteh examines the translation of euphemism and dysphemism in the English subtitles of the Egyptian film *Ramadan fawq al-Burkan* translated as *Ramadan atop the Volcano* by the Arab Radio and Television Network (ART), a giant media corporation in the Arab World. He remarks that the difficulties of subtitling these two rhetorical phenomena are twofold: First, euphemistic and dysphemistic expressions are culture-specific. Second, the technical constraints of subtitling

complicate the translator's task. He mentions three translation strategies used by the translator, namely, omission, addition and retention (p. 145). Another dimension of the complexity of euphemism in Arabic is that it is produced via four different rhetorical devices, namely figures of speech, circumlocutions, remodeling and antonyms. The decision to omit, retain or change a euphemistic/dysphemistic expression takes into consideration its function in the plot, translatability, the target viewers' background as well as the time and space available to the subtitler. Such restrictions require a great talent and a high level of competence not only in both languages, but also in the two cultures.

In his *The Subtitles of H. Dabbour: A Translational Dilemma*, Hayyan Al-Rosan (2012) argues that subtitling Arabic films is an important method to share the Arabic culture with the wider world, and that translation is a tool for mutual understanding and communication between people who speak different languages. He investigates the challenges of translating "such cultural elements as idioms, metaphors, collocations, cultural references, proper names and word play" in the above-mentioned Egyptian film produced by the Arab Company for Cinema Production and Distribution in 2008. Al-Rosan concludes that the subtitlers of the film have paid little attention to the context of culture-bound elements and thus failed to use the appropriate translation strategies (p. vi). He remarks that context is so vital in determining the translation strategy appropriate for each case of "translating cultural bounds" (p. 3).

One reason for the failure to render idioms correctly in the film is literal translation which distorts "the intended meaning of the ST" (p. 80). For the rendition of proper names, he suggests using gloss translation in the form of parenthetical notes after the transliterated name "to reproduce the same effect on the target audience" (ibid). Al-Rosan also criticizes the subtitles of the film for their lack of consistency (e.g. usage of British and American varieties together) and for the failure to relay puns in the TT, thus wasting the humor of the ST. Puns prove to be the most difficult to translate because they are deeply rooted in the local culture. Thus, they require a bi-cultural translator who has great talent in manipulating the words to reproduce the word play in the target culture. Like Alkadi (2010), Al-Rosan also underlines the necessity of editing the subtitles in order to correct the translation, grammatical and spelling mistakes before the film is aired with subtitles (p. 81). Finally, he suggests using a wide range of approaches, e.g. domestication and foreignization, as they offer a broad range of strategies for these linguistic and cultural bumps.

Muhammad Gamal (2013) states that although the subtitling industry has been active in Egypt since the 1930s, most of the work has been done from English to Arabic, and that few works have been done in the opposite direction. Nevertheless, the "emergence of the DVD technology prompted a surge in subtitling Egyptian films into English" (p. iii). He argues that the current subtitling practice in Egypt is flawed due to three reasons: subtitling is absent from the current university translation curricula; depending solely on the dialogue list to produce the subtitles without watching the film itself; and "the lack of film literacy" (ibid). He compares the work of the subtitler to Champollion's effort to decipher and translate hieroglyphics on the Rosetta Stone into a modern language (p. 2).

Gamal outlines the emergence and development of the DVD industry in Egypt and the Arab world, adding that this development has made Egyptian movies more internationally accessible through subtitling. However, he laments the absence, or at best the scarcity, of academic research and professional training in subtitling, which has led to the predominantly low-quality subtitles that mar the beauty of films. Other serious flaws in the subtitling industry in Egypt, Gamal claims, include the absence of translation briefs; the lack of editing and reviewing of the subtitles; and, most importantly, subtitlers (freelancers in most cases) work from the dialogue list without even watching the film, thus missing a great part of the meaning which is communicated through other non-linguistic elements such as sound effects, scenery, gestures and facial expressions (p. 28). Moreover, "idiomatic expressions and religious quotations" are among the stubborn obstacles that impede an efficient rendering of Egyptian films into English subtitles. Consequently, the resulting subtitles, he argues, were culprit in "the failure of the only Egyptian film participating at the 29<sup>th</sup> Cairo International Film Festival to win an award... [namely] *Laylat Suqot Baghdad* (The Night Baghdad Fell, 2005)" (pp. 34-35).

One of Gamal's contributions is his introduction of "an Egyptian typology" of the subtitling traps he deduced from the film corpus he studied. The ten types of subtitling difficulties he identifies are: the introduction to the film, film titles or names (taking into consideration their artistic and commercial aspects), culture-specific images, translating vernaculars, non-verbal communication, religious references (be they Islamic or Coptic Christian), humor, voices (e.g., soliloquy, narration), proper names, and the expression of the end (p. 144). Because of the deficiencies that enshroud the practice of subtitling in Egypt and the scarcity of academic research in this field, Gamal rightfully calls for more research to be done, and to recognize audiovisual translation as an independent and new academic discipline "*sui generis*" (2013, p. 158). Because "Subtitling is not translation" (given its special nature, constraints and strategies), this field claims special and undivided attention to improve its status quo (ibid).

In his 2014 article, Gamal continues to disapprove of the status of the audiovisual landscape in the Arab World where AVT has drawn little academic attention due to poor policy, poor education and the failure to practically grasp, much less acknowledge, the role of translation in the cultural life of more than 300 million native Arabic speakers (pp. 1-3). He maintains that the fast-growing technological advances and the digital revolution in the region have not been proportionately matched by development

in AVT due to the lack of vision and funds despite its potential benefits and promotion of Arab culture abroad. To boost this field academically, Gamal suggests that current professors of translation studies work as freelance subtitlers to get in touch with the software. This would help them develop practical AVT training courses. He also recommends building bridges between AVT and other related disciplines, namely the media and technology providers (p. 7) to promote the field both academically and professionally. Gamal is so enthusiastic about holding the first Arab conference on AVT (p. 11), a goal that has not been achieved so far.

This study is significant for the advancement of the field in the Arab World. A professional subtitler and academic himself, Gamal builds on his expertise, presenting a coherent picture of the lack of coherence that characterizes the AVT industry and research in most Arab countries. His diagnosis of the problem and the solutions he offers can form a point of departure for academics, translation companies and professionals to revolutionize the field and take Arab culture to international horizons. The Arab region is central to global geopolitics and culture and it deserves a much stronger presence in the international scene. Audiovisual translation is a powerful tool to achieve this goal.

Alharthi (2015) investigates the challenges of subtitling humor, particularly satire, in the American sitcom *Seinfeld* into Arabic, and the techniques employed in this transfer. He divides humor in his case study to two main types: language-based and culture-based. The latter type is more difficult to translate, especially if the joke is centered around a "monocultural" reference, in the sense that it is specific to the source culture (SC) as contrasted to "transcultural" references which may exist in both the source and target cultures (p. 27). He states that

Dealing with these cultural references is a difficult task for the translator, especially if they are the source of humour in a particular scene. In this case, applying the interventional strategies is a must in order to achieve a humorous effect. In other words, using the literal translation may convey the meaning, but it would certainly kill the humour and would often put off the TL audience (p. 36).

Alharthi adds that the most common translation strategies used by the subtitler of the series are addition, substitution, paraphrase, generalization (specially to render taboo words), retention (keeping a cultural reference as it is without any change or adaptation), and transliteration. Surprisingly, the subtitler uses the last two strategies to render culture-specific references which become humorless in the Arabic TT (p. 40). For Alharthi, cultural references require more freedom and utilization of other strategies like substitution and adaptation to produce an equivalent effect on the target audience.

Moreover, Alharthi argues that temporal and spatial constraints prevent the subtitler from providing the necessary cultural background that can help the target viewers understand the joke, thus contributing to the failure of transferring humor in some instances (p. 30). He believes that it is the responsibility of the viewers to understand a "transcultural" reference like the names of famous people, for "the audience's encyclopaedic knowledge of the transcultural ECR is essential for the understanding and appreciation of the satirical elements in the joke. This is one of the reasons that the translator did not utilise any interventional strategies" (p. 39). To some extent, we disagree with this because the audience is varied and comes from different backgrounds that cannot be controlled by the subtitler. Hence, he or she must not assume that the viewers will understand the foreign cultural reference implied in the joke, and so, it is his or her responsibility to be a 'cultural mediator' and spill that cultural reference to the audience. However, this does not exempt 'competent' viewers from exerting some effort to understand the culture-specific references in the film. While the time and space restrictions can really prevent the subtitler from unfolding ambiguous language or culture-bound references, the internet and globalization in general have made it much easier to learn about different cultures and to be a global citizen. Information that used to lie thousands of miles away a few years ago are now only a few clicks away on a computer and a few swipes away on any smart phone. Therefore, viewers should also be active and try to negotiate the meaning with the sender of the message to make sense out of the ambiguous subtitles.

Al-Adwan (2015) examines the use of euphemization in the Arabic subtitles of the American sitcom *Friends*. A famous trope used to achieve politeness and save the interlocutor's face, euphemism is employed to mitigate the offensiveness of taboo words and references to topics such as sex, death, swear words, some bodily functions, etc. (p. 6). Building on previous studies, Al-Adwan proposes his model of euphemization which can be achieved through seven strategies, namely widening, implication, metonyms, demetaphorization, borrowing, semantic misrepresentation and omission (p. 11). He argues that although the model is primarily relevant to monolingual pragmatic analysis, it can also be employed to downtone the bold, explicit English dialogue and make it more viewer-friendly for the Arab audience through subtitles. He also encourages researchers and translators to extend it to accommodate other areas in audiovisual translation (p. 19). This is an important issue in subtitling Western films and TV series into Arabic because Arab societies are generally more conservative, and euphemization of swear words and taboo topics is sometimes a must in order not to offend the target viewers. Otherwise, the work in its translated form will prove to be a failure for its cultural insensitivity. This is an agreement point between Al-Adwan and Alkadi (2010).

Khalaf (2016) summarizes the linguistic, cultural and technical “bumps” involved in the process of subtitling in general. Approaching this area from a functional point of view, he further reveals a more complicated hurdle, namely, the diversity of purposes or *skopoi* any ‘text’ can have even in its source language, be it a book or a film. It is the translator’s duty, he asserts, to select the most appropriate purpose to transfer to the target language, taking into consideration that the TT purpose(s) can be completely different from the ST purpose(s) because the audiences and their sociocultural contexts are different (pp. 125-6). This gives a theoretical justification for adaptation, omission and addition which aim to make the subtitles more relevant to the target audience.

Al-Kharabsheh and Yassin (2017) study the difficulties of subtitling colloquialisms in the Arabic film *Al-Makhdu'un* (1972) in its English version *The Dupes*. Analyzing the strategies used in the English translation, they explain the mistakes made by the subtitler (mistranslations, translation loss and no translation at all, especially for some expressions with religious connotations), and propose alternative translation techniques that could help deal with such linguistic traps caused by “the sharp cultural differences between these two languages, i.e., Arabic and English” (p. 19). In other words, in order to relay slang expressions and colloquialisms from Arabic to English adequately, a competent subtitler should not only understand the details of the film, but also the social and pragmatic contexts in which these expressions are uttered (ibid). This point spotlights the importance of pragmatics in subtitling.

Al-Kharabsheh and Yassin criticize the subtitler’s use of transliteration, explaining that the target audience (English speaking viewers) most probably do not understand the transliterated words, especially there is no space on the screen for footnotes to explain these ‘exotic’ words. They also criticize the overuse of omission as it deprives the audience from fully understanding the message of the original film (p. 26). Alternatively, they suggest using more communicative translations such as equivalent idiomatic expressions and idioms in English for their Arabic counterparts. However, they also suggest literal translation in some cases to reflect the spirit of the original and to introduce its cultural referents to the target viewers given that context is provided. Their suggestions highlight the necessity of flexibility on the part of the translator through using a broad variety of strategies to cater for the different linguistic and socio-cultural contexts that form the backdrop of the dialog.

Yasmin Moll (2017) explains Iqraa TV’s underlying translation philosophy and the conflicting arguments that underpin different translation decisions at its Subtitling Center in Cairo. She examines how “translational ideologies” and “translators’ practices of critique for the pragmatic assumptions they embed about what communication is and how it works in the world” shape the translation choices they make and the way they use certain words in the subtitles. Therefore, she looks “at subtitles not on-screen but off” (p. 336). Moll believes that the varying translation choices stem from the translators’ different ideologies which characterizes Islamic revival movements in Egypt. For her, subtitling at Iqraa is not simply a process of linguistic transfer on the screen; it is far more complicated than that, involving both external and internal critique. She remarks that translation decisions are influenced by the translators’ “external critique” inasmuch as they are aware of Western stereotypes about Islam and Muslims. For instance, she emphasizes that before the 9/11 attacks, Iqraa translators would use transliteration to render basic Islamic terms such as *Allah*. This ‘exotic’ term came to be perceived by the post-9/11 subtitlers as foreignizing to Western non-Muslim viewers, continuing to represent Islam as the *other* and would thus turn them off from watching the shows. Consequently, Iqraa subtitlers started to use the English (domestic) equivalent *God* which is both linguistically and culturally clear to the perceived target viewers.

Moll explains another kind of critique — an internal one — which is deeply rooted in the translators’ assumption that they had the right and authority to argue with the preachers and interpret their utterances in light of their own understanding of Islam, even if this involved divergence from what is actually said on the screen. In other words, sometimes the speaker would say clearly outrageous things that violated not only basic Islamic teachings and the channel’s vision, but even the simplest codes of tact. Examples of this include insulting non-Muslims, verbal violence, unacceptable exaggerations and sheer historical mistakes. Expected to have a sort of encyclopedic knowledge, or at least do the necessary research to ascertain of the information delivered by the speaker, the translator is caught in a conflict of multiple loyalties: Should s/he be loyal to the ST as uttered literally by the speaker no matter what s/he says? Or to the channel’s vision and mission and Islamic teachings (knowledge of which is a basic qualification to work there in the first place)? Or to the editor’s suggestions which sometimes challenge their own? The conflict is further complicated by the time and space restrictions that prevent them from spelling out some ambiguities and inconsistencies in the ST. All these factors make the translation process at Iqraa an exceptionally arduous and demanding task.

Moll also discusses the domestication-foreignization debate and states that although anthropologists and ethnologists prefer foreignization (because it is a means of resistance against “cultural imperialism” (pp. 343-344)), she asserts that Iqraa subtitlers prefer domestication because “foreignizing translations made the Arabic content seem incoherent, childlike, and even extraterrestrial in a reception context that greatly militates against a sympathetic reading of Islamic preaching programs” (p. 344). In addition, foreignization is likely to perpetuate some of the very misconceptions the whole translation work is aimed to subvert. For example, transliterating a word like *Jihad* without highlighting a contextual meaning that can mean *personal struggle* rather than *armed struggle* would do nothing but perpetuate the stigma of the word in Western culture.

In fact, this sharp awareness of the 'other' who is perceived to read the subtitles originated partly from hiring foreign editors (many were non-Muslims) who reviewed the subtitles. Sometimes, they said they did not understand the subtitles or something was unclear or offensive in them, and the subtitlers had to reformulate them to meet their expectations. This long collaboration between the Egyptian translators and the native English editors brought foreign audiences to the fore when translation decisions were made, and, indeed, it was one of the factors that kept the translation quality at Iqraa at such high standards.

All these technical, linguistic, pragmatic and even ideological considerations left their impressions on the translation decisions; subtitlers took liberties in many cases to the extent of diverging from what was actually uttered by the speaker because they assumed the responsibility of establishing communication bridges between their Islamic culture and Western viewers. Moll's essay expounds on the subtitling of Islamic programs at Iqraa from an anthropological perspective, building on her experience as an intern/editor at the Subtitling Center for some years. Although it is descriptive in nature, it is highly significant for understanding the translation decisions, why they were made and how subtitles were imagined to be received in the west.

Mohammad Mansy (2021) investigates the difficulties of subtitling Islamic TV programs from Arabic into English and classifies them into five types: technical, linguistic, rhetorical, cultural and informational, each of which has some subcategories. Technical problems consist in the space and time constraints that restrict translation choices due to the limited space on the screen and the limited duration of the subtitle. This forces the subtitler to condense the translation so that viewers can read it comfortably. Linguistic challenges arise from some phenomena such as polysemy, semantic development, idioms as well as peculiarities of Arabic grammar. Rhetorical difficulties — common in subtitling Islamic TV shows — are typical of poetry, figurative language, humor and sarcasm. Mansy also analyzes cultural challenges such as Islamic concepts and terminology, Qur'anic allusions, Sunnah allusions as well as politicized terms and sensitive issues like Jihad. Informational challenges refer to the inaccurate statements or misinformation mentioned in the source text and whether the subtitler has the right to diverge from it and correct it onscreen.

Employing Christian Nord's translation-oriented text analysis model, Mansy suggests a set of translation techniques that are appropriate for each type of these difficulties. For instance, he concludes that instrumental translation strategies (e.g., paraphrase, modulation, cultural substitution, adaptation, transcreation and compensation) are effective in overcoming technical, informational and culture-specific problems, while documentary translation strategies (e.g., borrowing, bracketing, calque and literal translation) present good solutions to linguistic and rhetorical problems as well as universal cultural references. However, flexibility, creativity and cultural sensitivity should always be present when the subtitler makes the translation decisions — these are among the basic qualifications of the subtitler who should use a variety of source culture-oriented and target culture-oriented styles. Moreover, Mansy explains that some translation mistakes in unedited subtitles stem from a lack of training. Therefore, he suggests designing subtitling courses through collaboration between academics and professionals or between universities and subtitling companies/TV channels. The outcome would be more competent subtitlers who are catalysts for positive change in the world. This study suggests solutions to practical problems in the field, closes some gaps in the research and paves the way for further research deemed necessary to establish audiovisual translation, especially subtitling, as an academic field in Egyptian and Arab universities.

### 3. Gaps in the Research

Despite all these studies in the field, this area is still a virgin land and there are many gaps in the current body of research that merit researchers' attention. For example, some researchers studied subtitling in light of the functional approach; however, we need to explore its relevance to other translation theories and linguistic models such as the Interpretive Theory of Translation (ITT), Relevance Theory, Accommodation Theory, Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), Grice's Cooperative Principle, Brondeel's Model and others. Ideally, we can think of developing a theoretical model for English-Arabic subtitling that would be useful in professional training and practice as well as application in academic research. Another research area which can be investigated is representing language variations in subtitling. Language varies (phonologically, lexically, morphologically, syntactically, stylistically, etc.) across geographical areas, socioeconomic classes, age groups, genders, etc., and these variations are often skipped in subtitling. We need to represent disadvantaged and less represented groups in the society in AVT productions. This research intersects with social studies and sociolinguistics and can be a promising area in interdisciplinary studies.

There is also a pressing need for specialized dictionaries and encyclopedias of cultural references that would help translation students and professionals understand and transfer both universal and culture-specific allusions in subtitling. Such compilations would be a significant contribution to linguistic, translation and cultural studies. Moreover, there are many academic and professional benefits in the application of subtitling to other disciplines such as foreign language teaching and learning. Thanks to its multimodal nature, the 'fleeting' subtitles can be used to improve learners' reading speeds and reading skills (especially skimming and scanning) the lack of which correlates with poor performance in language acquisition and standardized test results such as the IELTS and TOEFL. On the other hand, manipulation of audio-tracks (with or without subtitles) can improve listening skills for lower-level language learners. Additionally, the written subtitles can accommodate the deaf and hard-of-hearing while the audio-tracks can accommodate the blind and students with visual impairments in the same class. The visual and acoustic

components of the audiovisual material are great sources of teaching culture which is central to foreign language teaching and learning. Needless to say, analysis of authentic subtitled material can be an important component in subtitling courses and curricula if carefully selected.

Another area of research (and teaching) which is less heavily trodden is the role of non-linguistic elements (visual clues and sound effects) in subtitling. Unawareness of these aspects causes misunderstanding and mistranslation of the original message. Furthermore, since technology is revolutionizing AVT research and practice and has given rise to accessibility studies which seek to make media content available to people with sensory disabilities (through subtitling for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, and audio-description for the blind and the visually challenged), future research can investigate the efficiency of eye-tracking and text-to-speech audio description devices as well as accessibility apps like AudioMovie, MovieReading and OpenArt.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This review article has set out to outline subtitling research in the Arab World in order to map out the major areas of research and to detect any gaps in the current body of literature to help researchers bridge these gaps and expand this growing field. It has been found out that the bulk of the literature has analyzed the technical aspects of subtitling (such as the space and time limitations which result in translation loss); linguistic challenges (i.e. the lexical, grammatical and semantic idiosyncrasies of both Arabic and English which pose translation pitfalls); rhetorical devices (such as euphemism, humor and puns); as well as the difficulties of transferring cultural references and idioms. Those challenges have also been addressed by researchers who proposed effective translation strategies to overcome them. However, there are still many areas that have not been adequately covered in most Arab universities: these include applying major translation theories and linguistic models such as the Interpretive Theory of Translation (ITT), Relevance Theory, Accommodation Theory, Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS), Grice's Cooperative Principle and Brondeel's Model to the study of subtitling. Moreover, there is an acute shortage in accessibility studies (which aim to make audiovisual material accessible to visually impaired audiences as well as the deaf and hard-of-hearing). Further research also needs to focus on the usefulness of subtitling to foreign language teaching and learning. As mentioned earlier, there is a real need for serious cooperation between academia and the industry. In fact, this shortage in the research resulted in many flaws in professional practice due to the lack of competent and well-trained screen translators. Cooperation between universities and subtitling/translation agencies can take the form of designing subtitling courses that can be offered to undergraduate translation students and professionals alike. To the best of our knowledge, Hamad bin Khalifa University in Qatar is the only institution of higher education in the MENA region that offers MA degrees in audiovisual translation with focus on subtitling and dubbing. This is a great move, but it should be followed by more universities and training centers across the region to take this industry to the next level and participate in promoting Arab culture globally. Finally, this article does not claim to be comprehensive, but at least, it has defined the major trends in the current body of research and diagnosed some gaps therein that, hopefully, can facilitate the work of researchers in the future in order to cope with the latest developments in the field and address the emergent needs of subtitling audiences in the Arab region.

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