| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Arabic Audio-Visual Translation Censorship: A Corpus Study of Subtitles of Three Films

Dr Mohammed Albarakati

Department of Modern Languages and Literature, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
Corresponding Author: Dr Mohammed Albarakati, **E-mail**: Maalbarakati@kau.edu.sa

| ABSTRACT
Audio-visual translation is one of the most dynamic types of translation. As this form of translation deals with culture as well as language media is often altered to remove sensitive elements. This is common in the Arab world where censor boards filter media before its rerelease. The strategies employed in censorship have been influenced by advancements in technology and mass media narratives. This paper therefore examines the subtitling strategies employed in film censorship by examining three American films, namely, The Hangover, Bridesmaids, and What Women Want. The research adopts Pederson's taxonomy (2017) as a theoretical framework in addition to the three strategies proposed in this study 'tone down,' 'upgrading,' and 'normalizing'. The results indicated that censorship is common in the Arab world in the forms of omission and euphemism. Moreover, it was found that subtitles employ high register language when rendering the low register language of the source text despite the availability of low register language choices. The study recommends that dialectical and non-standard Arabic be used for the rendering of sensitive elements. Future studies may build on these findings to improve the understanding of censorship trends and unconventional movements.

| KEYWORDS

Arabic subtitling, subtitling strategies, censorship, sensitive elements

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

1. Introduction

Language in its various forms is a channel through which cultures communicate their ideas, and idiosyncrasies. However, media has partially replaced the historical modes of cultural exchange carried out by traditional forms of communication, such as in person communication. Therefore, the cultural load carried by films across languages is quite significant and reveals current gaps, such as between Western and Eastern cultures, despite attempts made by audio-visual translation (henceforth AVT) to bridge them. AVT is a vibrant and dynamic field of translation (Abu-Rayyash, Haider, & Al-Adwan, 2023; Al-Jabri et al., 2021; Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah, 2019; Gamal, 2020, 2014; Gambier and Gottlieb, 2001; Thawabteh, 2010). Yet, one of the serious areas, which AVT studies struggle to address, is the area of culture sensitive elements (henceforth SEs), generally called 'taboo elements.' These refer to topics and themes that people of a particular culture find embarrassing or offensive (Sahari, 2023).

Conservative cultures, such as Arabic ones, require special renditions of texts that are loaded with culturally sensitive issues, such as references to sex, drugs, alcohol, and profanities (Haider, Saideen, & Hussein, 2023). To meet the requirements of Arabic audiences, censorship has become both common practice and the adopted strategy when it comes to the Arabic subtitling of Western films to bridge the gap between the two distant cultures.

Additionally, with the twenty-first century witnessing a boom in the film industry, AVT began playing an important role in cross-cultural exchange. Moreover, due to the strong impact of Hollywood cinema, and English's status as a lingua franca, the impact of Western films on other languages and cultures is strong and immediate. (Diaz Cintas and Remael, 2007:29).

Societal representations, particularly in popular mass media narratives, such as films, have undergone drastic changes in the past two decades. With recent advancements in technology and mass media narratives, film censorship strategies might have undergone a change in the past two decades as well. However, this sensitive area of research, which deals with a subject that can have a great impact on society, has been neglected, academically. This is especially true in the Arab world, and particularly when it comes to defining the strategies adopted in films featured more than 10 years ago. Thus, a research gap exists, and the academic area needs further research exploration.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate whether film censorship policies and censorship strategies followed in the Arab region have changed over the past few decades. The objective will be achieved by exploring how sensitive elements of the source [English] language were treated in subtitles of film texts ten years ago. The secondary objective of this study is to examine the Western cultural aspects reflected in culturally oriented English films presented to [English-speaking] Arab youth through subtitled films released in the Arab world. This also involves studying how well the subtitles adhere to target language norms.

2.0 Literature Review
2.0.1. Censorship in Films
Censorship, as defined in Collins Dictionary, is "the practice or policy of censoring films, letters, or publications." Historically speaking, film presentations have changed drastically over time, as Doherty (2010: 145) notes: "In 1956 […] the family audience could go en masse to Hollywood films without being embarrassed. […] With a speed that stunned audiences and enraged censors, American films lapsed into an "immorality" that bruised, bent, and finally broke the Code commandments." Doherty (2010: 145) continues, saying that, "Soon what defined mainstream Hollywood production had changed forever. The old mainstream, the mass-audience "family-entertainment" enjoyed by all age groups, no longer existed as such."

Censorship is an inescapable fate of texts carried across cultures. Scandura (2004: 126) outlines four reasons for censorship. First, it is done for political reasons, where governments may control content aired on state-owned channels. Second, content can be censored for political correctness, where acute cultural differences are mitigated through censorship. Third, religion is considered a good reason for content modification to avoid religious profanity or blasphemy. Fourth, translators themselves employ their own self-censorship filter and decide to modify certain elements because they feel they are not appropriate" (Scandura, 2004:127). Translators, by attempting to adapt, try to protect the audience from what they deem culturally sensitive content, which may come at the expense of the accuracy of the translation message.

AVT is often controlled by state regulations, where blunt language and culture-sensitive content are modified to suit the target audience. A study conducted on scatological vocabulary in Brazilian subtitles found that these words were either curbed or avoided (Alfaro de Carvalho, 2012). Similarly, when English-language films are broadcast in the Arab world, the audience is exposed to various cultural differences that cover a wide array of topics. The contents of a film are censored due to the simple fact that what one culture may find amusing, another can easily find offensive.

Censorship may not be applicable to American films only, but to almost all English language films that contain a great deal of swear words, or vulgar language, in general. House (1977:108) suggests what she calls a "cultural filter," that needs to be applied in such circumstances. She describes filter as, "viewing the source text through the glasses of a target language member."

American films are extremely popular in the Arab world, and hence on Arab channels. Due to the fact that American films are full of swear words and taboo themes, a great number of Arabs might find their contents inappropriate, which causes Arab channels to alter the subtitles, image, and sound, leaving the viewers with more of a 'non-offensive' film.

By altering the subtitles, one problem is avoided: the Arab audience will not be offended. However, this process causes new problems. Arab audiences who have no clue about Western culture, combined with a low to zero level proficiency in English, do not grasp the actual meaning of what is being said just by watching and reading the masked subtitles. In addition to this, Arab youth, for whom English is an increasing part of their everyday language, get a distorted picture of the true significance of the swear words they are now making part of their vocabulary. Hassan et al (2009: 186) give the following example: An actor pronounces a very offensive swear word, for example, a taboo word or an 'inappropriate' body part. This swear word will be translated with a less offensive equivalent such as *ya lal'ar* (lit. what a shame), *'arun 'alayk* (lit. shame on you), @*ant waqih* (lit. you are impudent), @*ila aljahim* (lit. to the hellfire)**.** What is being presented in the subtitles is not anywhere near as vulgar as what is being said on the screen. As a result, English-speaking Arab youth think that these words are acceptable and start using them in everyday life.

Using these terms can put them in compromising situations where they need to bear the consequences of their expressions even if they did not have full volition over their inappropriateness. For instance, the use of such expressions in respectful areas like schools and places of worship can lead to backlash both to the youth and to their families. This is especially true in family-oriented societies where respect is highly esteemed.

Alabbasi (2009) claims that the solution for this problem is that the pronunciation of swear words in the source language should be deleted from the sound in a way that it is undetectable to the audience. However, with the fact that English is gaining a continuum among Arab youth, words removed from the source language can be easily noticed. Additionally, in a situation where the youth understand English and the parents do not, families may end up watching highly inappropriate films together. Thus, the youth take in indecent material without their parents' knowledge. Therefore, someone might suggest that the translator should literally translate what is being said in the source language so that Arab parents, who do not understand English, know what they are exposing their children to. In this way, it is highly probable that extremely vulgar films will not be broadcast easily in the Arab world. Conducting this study on this sample of ten-year-old films can be of great significance for later studies aiming at investigating new trends in subtitling censorship in the Arab world. According to Alabbasi (2009:186), swear words and vulgar language should be filtered and translated such that the actual meaning of the swear word is concealed. The meaning of swear words can cause feelings of "anger, hostility, dissatisfaction, frustration, insult, scorn, or humiliation." These feelings should be displayed in a weakened way, so that they do not appear as vulgar or offensive to the target audience. This is certainly the case for most American films loaded with swear words, in different contexts and situations. These swear words may be considered disgusting, immoral, and impolite by an Arab audience, especially when the film is watched by the whole family (Alabbasi, 2009).

2.0.2. Profanity and Obscene Language
Sensitive Elements (SEs) have been widely discussed in AVT by scholars and institutions. For instance, in films, many scholars (such as Andersson and Trudgill [1990], Allan and Burridge [2006], Allan [2018] and Alsharhan [2020], Roberts et al. [1999]), and institutions have proposed different typologies for SEs. Among the existing available classifications of SEs, the most common categories found in the films under investigation are as follows:

- Profanity
- Sex
- Drugs
- Alcohol
- Religious elements

One well-known typology was proposed by Allan and Burridge (2006:1), who classified taboos into five categories:

i. Body and its effluvia, such as sweat and fluids, including snots, feces, and menstrual fluid;
ii. Sexually related organs and acts;
iii. Disease, death and killing;
iv. Naming of people and addressing them;
v. Food and fluid consumption at gatherings.

The above categories are mostly Western-oriented and may partly cater to other cultures. Therefore, Sharifi and Darchinyan (2009) proposed another typology that applies more specifically to Persian culture, which is less alien to Arabic culture than its Western counterpart. Their study found that taboo language-constraints may belong to:

i. Legitimate and illegitimate relations as well as related actions, such as: kissing, hugging, and the like;
ii. Sexually oriented relations before marriage
iii. Naming of sexual organs and their parts;
iv. Alcoholism and drugs;
v. Swear words and name calling;
vi. Talking about immoral behaviors and habits, such as theft or bribery
vii. Blasphemy and religious beliefs that go against the translator's ideology.
viii. Political issues that could have negative consequences for society and political situations.

2.0.3. Subtitling Strategies
With regard to subtitling, Pedersen (2017, 2007, 2005) proposed seven strategies that are often followed when rendering culture-bound items. Apart from omission, where the source text (ST henceforth) item is removed completely from the subtitle, (which is considered neutral in his taxonomy,) he divides these strategies into two main types: minimum change strategies and intervention strategies. The minimum change strategies are explained as follows:

1. Retention: The ST culture-bound references are kept unchanged or only a slight adaptation is made in the subtitle to cater to the target culture requirements.
2. Official equivalent: This type of equivalence assumes that there is a commonly used rendering for the ST item, which can also be given or suggested by an official authority to the subtitling team.
3. Direct translation: A literal translation is provided where utterance meaning is given priority over style and cultural specificity.

There were three intervention strategies.

1. Specification: Extra explanation or information is added to the subtitle to make the target text more specific than the ST is.
2. Generalisation: This strategy is the opposite of specification where a more general word (a hypernym) is used to render a more specific one (a hyponym)
3. Substitution: The ST item is replaced by a TT rendering that may deviate slightly from the semantic meaning a little bit (involves a breach of reference in Pedersen's words). However, deviation from meaning could be insignificantly subtle.

Pederson (2017:217) further complements this model with a tentative model for quality assessment that comprises three criteria for the assessment of subtitles (i.e., FAR). The first criterion is 'Functional Equivalence,' which gauges "how well the message or meaning is rendered in the subtitled translation." That is, according to Pederson (2017:218), subtitles should convey not only the utterance but also the intended message. Therefore, when subtitles fail to provide "Functional Equivalence," semantic or stylistic errors occur. A semantic error is, basically, a misinterpretation of the utterance meaning, whereas stylistic errors are concerned with using the wrong register. The semantic error is far more serious than the latter. The second criterion is *acceptability,* which measures "how well the subtitles adhere to target language norms." Although this may sound as if it is related to the correct usage of grammar, in essence, it is more related to making the subtitles sound natural in the target language. In other words, this criterion may consider grammatical, spelling, or idiomatic errors. The third criterion is *readability,* which should ensure that viewers can easily understand the subtitles. Clearly, this criterion deals with technical issues of subtitling regarding whether there are, for example, segmentation or reading speed errors.

2.1. Empirical Studies

Current Research on the subtitling of films viewed in the Arab world is an emerging field of study, in which most studies are focused primarily on the recurring strategies already in use. Al-Adwan (2015), for example, conducted a study on euphemism used as a strategy to express politeness in the Arabic subtitles of the American series 'Friends.' The findings revealed that various strategies, such as omission, semantic representation, borrowing, demetaphorisation, metonyms, implications, and widening were used to tackle SEs in the Arabic subtitles. A more recent study conducted on five Netflix programs, which is not a state-controlled platform, found that euphemism and register shifts are employed to tackle SEs in these programs (Alsharhan, 2020).

Abdelaal (2019), on the other hand, analyzed the subtitling data of the movie 'The American Pie.' Two of his major findings are noteworthy. He found that euphemistic words are used to render culturally sensitive elements. He also found that formal Arabic language is used to tackle informal English language expressions. This is understandable, however, due to differences across the English and Arabic strata of registers, the closest Arabic language register to informal and colloquial English is the vernacular level (i.e., *al'ammiyyah*). However, this level is mostly used in spoken language and often avoided in written language. Therefore, the closest writable equivalent level a subtitler would use is the formal.

Al Tamimi and Mansi (2023) outline major studies conducted on Arabic subtitling. Reviewing more than 12 studies conducted in the broad area of Arabic subtitling, they found that studies have focused on linguistic problems, technical issues in subtitling, rhetorical devices, and culturally sensitive elements across cultures (p. 8). The researchers concluded that academia has failed to cope with recent advancements in the subtitling industry. This is quite comprehendible because this area stands at the crossroads among linguistic studies, media studies, culture studies, political studies, religious studies, ethics, philosophy, and economic studies.

In view of the preliminary review of the existing literature on the topic and the research gap identified, the present study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are the translation strategies used for the subtitling of sensitive elements in English language films released in the Arab world?

RQ 2: How successful are these strategies in creating culturally acceptable versions of films according to the functional equivalency criterion?

3.0 Methodology
The present study followed a mixed-methods research methodology (Creswell & Crewell, 2017). While the analysis is primarily qualitative in nature, it has also drawn upon quantitative insights to explore the strategies that are used more frequently to render SEs. In order to achieve a holistic research-based design, the study employs Content Analysis (CA) (De Wever et al., 2006; Krippendorff, 2018) to meet the aims of this study. CA "is a method for analyzing the content of a variety of data, such as visual and verbal data. It enables the reduction of phenomena or events into defined categories so as to better analyze and interpret them" (Harwood & Gary, p. 479).

3.1. Corpus of the Study
The films selected for this study are the following American films: 1) *The Hangover, 2) Bridesmaids,* 3) *What Women Want. The Hangover*, directed by Todd Phillips, was featured in 2009, in which Ed Helms, Bradley Cooper, Zach Galifianakis, and Justin Bartha played the lead roles. Its sequels, Hangover II and III, followed in 2011 and 2013. It is a comedy film in which three partying friends lose their memory of the previous night and start searching for a fourth friend after a wild bachelor party. The film is loaded with coarse language, especially owing to their corresponding themes such as wild partying, relationships, and casino visits.

Bridesmaids, directed by Paul Feig and produced by Judd Apatow, was released in 2011, in which the lead roles were played by Kristen Wiig, Maya Rudolph, Rose Byrne, Melissa McCarthy, Jon Hamm, Chris O'Dowd, and Rebel Wilson. One of the female characters gets married, and so she chooses one of her friends to be her maid of honour. Although the plot may cause one to feel that it is more of a family type film, both the romantic scenes, and scenes featuring alcohol consumption make it a good candidate for a subtitling problematic film.

What Women Want is a romantic comedy film, which came out in 2011 as an Asian remake of an American film with the same title released in 2000. Directed by Daming Chen, the film features two attractive and charismatic Asian superstars, Gong Li and Andy Lau. Andy Lau plays a ladies' man, a sweet talker who is experienced enough to seduce women. Gong Li plays an attractive woman, a professional in the same advertising business where Andy works. They share many business scenes, yet alcoholism is a recurring theme even in those scenes. A comedy flavor can make such a romantic film a good sample of SEs with its natural tackling of these situations.

3.2. Research Procedures
The study is situated within the realm of Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) (2012) framework, which is a sub-field of the branch "pure translation studies" as illustrated in the famous Holmes/Toury map of the discipline of translation studies (Toury, 1995: 10). This sub-field is concerned with the examination of three aspects in translation: the product, the function, and the process. For the purpose of this study in particular, a product-based descriptive translation study is conducted to examine the corpus. To achieve the stated research objectives, this study was designed as follows:

- Selection of three American English films, at least 10-years old; subtitled, and featured on mainstream Arabic channels
- Extracting English and Arabic subtitles of films
- Compiling the corpus by aligning the source text with Arabic subtitles
- Analysis of subtitles in accordance with adopted subtitling framework
- Assessment of subtitling strategy to check whether it addresses the F criteria (i.e., functional equivalency)

The corpus of this study is composed of the source text (ST) from selected American films: 1) *The Hangover, 2) Bridesmaids,* 3) *What Women Want*, and their subtitled versions broadcast on the Saudi channels MBC2 and MBC Action. Using the qualitative content analysis, the parallel corpus comprises ST and the translated text (TT) of the three above-mentioned films that cover five SE themes: 1) religion, 2) sex, 3) excrement, 4) alcohol, and 5) drugs. The analysis compares between the source texts and the translations (i.e., subtitles) to explore whether the subtitles were subject to censorship and what strategies were used to render these elements. The selected films are representative of popular films as per the reviews on specialized online film databases, such as https://www.rottentomatoes.com, and https://www.imdb.com. It is highly likely that popular films address a wide spectrum of audiences, and where "inappropriate" scenes would make parents and children, who are watching a film together feel embarrassed.

3.3. Analytical Framework
The taxonomy of strategies proposed by Pedersen (2017, p.74) for translating culture-specific items was partly adopted in this study. However, in order to comprehensively cover all the decisions made by the subtitlers of the three movies, the researcher has added four more strategies to Pedersen's taxonomy, namely, 'omission,' 'tone down,' 'upgrading,' and 'normalizing.' '*Omission*' is the strategy when the source text word is not translated; while '*tone down*' occurs when the acuteness of the SE in the ST is mitigated with a less offensive translation. '*Upgrading*' occurs when the SE is elevated in the subtitles in an attempt to hide all the traces of cultural sensitivity, whereas '*normalizing*' occurs when an SE element is rendered with a neutral word or expression.

Functional equivalency was assessed from the three FAR criteria to examine subtitle quality in terms of their cultural functional equivalency (see Appendix 1).

4.0 Results and Discussion

The results obtained from the content analysis are presented in the following subsections. The linguistic elements perceived by the censor boards as sensitive to Arab audiences are broadly classified into five categories: religion, sex, profanity, drugs, and alcohol, which are presented as treated in the subtitles. Table 1 presents the censor's treatment of sensitive linguistic elements classified under the category 'religion' in the three movies mentioned above.

Table 1: Treatment of Sensitive Linguistic Elements Under the Category 'Religion'

Source language	Subtitle	Strategy Adopted	Functional equivalence
Hell (14x)	Never translated.	14x Omission	×
Jesus (Christ) (8x)	3x: Not translated.	3x Omission/	×
	5x: يا للهول (what a misery!).	5x toned down	×
Oh my God/God/Oh dear Lord (24x)	1x: Not translated.	1x Omission/	×
	23x: يا للهول (what a misery!).	23x toned down	×
Goddamn (8x)	2x: Not translated.	2x Omission	×
	2x: يا للهول 1x: تبًا. 3x: بئسآ.	6 toned down	√
Holy + swear word (8x)	Never translated.	8x Omission	×
Damn (3x)	1x: Not translated.	1x Omission/	×
	1x: تبًا (darn!). 1x: بئسآ (how annoying!).	2x toned down	√

The corpus shows a high frequency of religious references with the word 'God' occurring in three variations; God, Lord and Goddamn occur in 32 instances. In the rest of the instances, the strategy of 'toning down' is used where the acuteness of the source text is mitigated with words such as *yalalhawl* يا للهول, an exclamation that is more concerned with hazard and fear, and بئسآ *bi@san* which is literally concerned with misery (i.e. *bu@s*). Nonetheless, translators did not consistently replace ST phrases with the same TT phrases in every instance. Hell, which is normally subtitled *jahim*, is mentioned in the original text corpus 14 times but omitted throughout the subtitles. One reason that could have triggered this translational choice was that *'Hell'* was used as an interjection to express surprise or contempt. Therefore, subtitlers seemed to have gone for omission relying on the image and sound in the original movie to convey the omitted part. Yet, a functional equivalent word such as "*madha!*" (*i.e., what!*), could have been used to render the omitted interjection.

Moreover, the three words *yalalhawl*, *bi@san,* and *tabban* occurred in 36 instances to render religion-related SE words such as God, Lord, Goddamn, and damn. Omission was used 29 times in this category to render 66 religion-related SE instances. With regard to the F criterion, omission is not considered a functional equivalence, as silence cannot be seen as equivalent to an SE reference fully rendered.

Table 2, below, presents the treatment of the SEs under the category 'sex' in the three movies mentioned above.

Table 2: Treatment of Sensitive Linguistic Elements Under the Category 'Sex'

Source language	Subtitle	Strategy adopted	Functional equivalence
'Fuck' as a swear word (86x)	69 x: Not translated.	69x omission	×
	15x: بئسآ (how annoying!). 1x: يا للهول (what a misery!). 1x: تبًا (darn!).	17x Toned down	√
Motherfucker (4x)	1x: Not translated.	1x omission	×
	3x: سافل (lowlife).	3x Toned down	√

Bastard (1x)	سافل (lowlife).	1x Toned down	√
I'm screwed (1x)	قُضي عليّ (I'm done).	1x Toned down	√
'Fuck' as in sexual intercourse/sex (6x)	3x: معاشرة (relations). 3x: الجنس (sex).	3x Toned down 3x retention	√ √
Butt-fucking (1x)	يعانق (hugs).	1x Toned down	×
Gay/faggot (5x)	3x: Not translated. 1x:المخنّث (effeminate). 1x منحرف (derailed).	3x omission 2x retention	× √
Pervert (1x)	منحرف (derailed).	1 retention	√
Male private body parts (5x)	1x: Not translated. 1x:عضو (member). 1x: منطقة حساسة (sensitive area). 1x: سافل (lowlife). 1x: غبيّ (dumb).	1x omission 4x Toned down	× √
Female private body parts (3x)	2x: قوام (figure). 1x: مفاتن (charms).	3x Upgraded	×
Tight (1x)	لائقة (decent).	1x Upgraded	×
Hard body (1x)	قوام ممشوق (slim build).	1x retention	√
Asshole (5x)	1x: Not translated. 1x: سافل (lowlife). 2x: غبيّ (dumb). 1x: نذل (scoundrel).	1x omission 4x Toned down	× ×
STDs (1x)	Translated literally.	1x retention	√
Stripping (4x)	رقص (dancing)	1x upgraded	×
Grinding and dry humping	تتمايل (swinging)	1x upgraded	×
Whore/hooker/ prostitute (3x)	بائعة هوى (prostitute)	1x upgraded	×
Rape (5x)	الاعتداء (attack)	5x normalized	×
Bitch (3x)	1x: Not translated. 2x: سافل (lowlife).	1x Omission 2x Toned down	× √

The category of sex- and sex-related terms of abuse had the highest number of instances, with the word 'fuck' occurring 86 times. The subtitles were omitted 69 times and toned down with words such as *bi@san, ya lalhawl,* and *tabban* (i.e., literally, cut but used as an exclamatory remark). However, the word 'fuck, ' as used for intercourse, is used six times, but it has been subtitled three times with the word *jins*, which literally means sex, and three times with the word *mu@asharah*, which is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. The swear word 'motherfucker' occurred four times in three of which it was toned down, whereas in one instance, it was omitted. *Munharif* (literally, pervert) was used to render both 'bastard' and 'pervert.' Male private parts occurred 5 times, in four of which it was toned down with a euphemism that literally translates to 'sensitive area' i.e., *mantaqah hassasah*. Nonetheless, female private parts have been upgraded with *qawam,* i.e., body figure, and *mafatin,* i.e., 'charming parts.' 'Asshole' has been used five times in the original. Although it was omitted once, it was translated with its direct contextual equivalent *safil, ghabi*, and *nadhl.* These words reflect the vulgar meaning of 'asshole' as a stupid and low-standard person. 'Rape,' which occurred five times, has been normalized with @i'tida@ which means assault. Its direct equivalent that is, @ightisab, could have been used without evoking any loss of the face. 'Gay/ faggot' occurs five times. It has been omitted in three instances and retained in two as *a mukhannath* and *munharif*. The former, i.e., literally 'effeminate,' is more of a dysphemistic label in Arabic than the latter, which literally means 'derailed.' Nonetheless, stripping has been upgraded in subtitles with the word *raqs*, which is, dancing. 'Grinding and dry humping' are also upgraded with the word *tatamayal*, i.e., to sway one's body. Words such as whore, hooker and prostitute are rendered as *ba@i'at hawa*, i.e., seller of whim.

Embarrassing Arabic SE references are normally expressed using euphemism to avoid incurring any loss of face. Nonetheless, when the context requires clarity, as in medical contexts in which clarity of communication can significantly affect the accuracy of diagnosis, exact words are used. Moreover, an authentic *hadeeth* recounts the story of a man called *Ma'iz*, who had sexual

intercourse with a woman and came to Prophet Mohammed to repent. Prophet Mohammed had to ask him very clearly to avoid any misunderstanding: did you have sex with her? (Al-Bukhari, 2003).

Table 3 presents the treatment of SEs under the category' profanity/excrement in the three above mentioned movies.

Table 3: Treatment of Sensitive Linguistic Elements Under the Category 'Excrements'

Source language	Subtitle	Strategy adopted	Functional equivalence
Shit (41x)	24x: Not translated.	24x omission	×
	11x: بئسآ (how annoying!). 5x: يا للهول (what a misery!). 1x: تبآ (darn!).	17x Toned down	√
Bullshit (3x)	1x: Not translated.	1x omission	×
	2x: ترهات (nonsense).	2x Toned down	√

The category of excrements has the least number of occurrences in this corpus with only two variations: *shit* and *bullshit*. Shit is a very common cuss word in English. Dictionaries link the denotations of this word to feces, but its connotations are remarkably different as it is often used to express surprise and astonishment or as an exclamatory word to modify a bad situation. On the other hand, bullshit, which literally means feces of a bull, is often used to express surprise about lies and untruths. It can also be used to modify foolish things that people do. The word shit occurred 41 times in the corpus. It is omitted 24 times in the subtitles and toned down 17 times with more general words, such as *bi@san, ya lalhawl,* and *tabban*. Its other variation, *'bullshit,'* is used three times in the corpus, omitted once, and toned down with its direct contextual equivalent twice, as *turrahat,* i.e., nonsense. These translations could convey an exclamatory function, and simultaneously address the F-criterion as they bear no reference to excretion. Omission, as a strategy, is more pervasively used to tackle distasteful words referring to excretion. However, toning down particular words and expressions is more functional than omitting the whole word or expression altogether.

In regard to the category of 'drugs and alcohol,' references to drugs are all translated literally, whereas, references to alcohol are either translated as they are or toned down.

Table 4 presents the treatment of SEs under the category 'Alcohol' referenced in the three movies mentioned above.

Table 4: Treatment of Sensitive Linguistic Elements Under the Category 'Alcohol'

Source language	Subtitle	Strategy adopted	Functional equivalence
References to alcohol (7x)	6x: translated.	6x retention	√
	1x: مشوش (confused)	1x Toned down	×
Driving drunk (2x)	1x: translated. 1x: تجولنا ثملين (walking drunk)	2x retention	×
I fudged up (1x)	كنت ثملآ جدآ (I was very drunk).	1x retention	×

Drug-related words were spotted in 10 instances in the corpus. References to alcohol occurred 7 times, retained in the subtitles 6 times, and toned down one time with the word '*mushawwash'* i.e., confused which neither conveys the semantics, nor the functions of the source text. In my assessment, the retention strategy managed to address the F criterion. Alcohol consumption was retained in the subtitles with words such as *thamil* (i.e., drunk). The word *thamil*, however, is a standard Arabic word that bears some formal nuances, unlike vernacular or slang words, which bear negative connotations, like *sakran* (i.e. drunk) or *mi'tibha* (i.e. wasted). In other words, the word *thamil* belongs to a higher register as opposed to *sakran*, which is the functional equivalent of 'drunk.' Thus, functional equivalence was not addressed in this category, except in six instances when reference to alcohol was accurately retained. Acceptability and readability are addressed in this category.

Both Arabic and English are diglossic languages. English consists of Standard English, which is used in education, and other formal settings. It is also comprised of informal English, which is used in everyday conversations; and slang, which is usually used in English language movies to express SEs. On the other hand, Standard Arabic is used in media, writing, education, and official correspondences. In addition to standard Arabic, Arabic includes both colloquial and dialectical variations that are mostly regional, such as: *Khaliji* with its sub-variations; spoken in the Arabian Gulf states, *Shami*; which is spoken with its sub-variations in the northern states of the Arabian peninsula, also known as the Levant area, consisting of Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine; *Misri* dialect, which is more pervasively used in films and TV shows owing to Egypt's precedence in media production. Other less

commonly used variations, are found in the media of North African Arab states, such as Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. Arabic speakers express SEs more freely with their dialectical choices but not with Standard Arabic, which seems to be the issue in subtitling these SEs across the two languages (Haider & Hussein, 2022).

It was found that religion-related SE instances are of two types: references to religious entities, such as Jesus, Christ, and Lord, and swear words, such as goddamn, damn, and hell. The first type, although used as exclamatory expressions, can be rendered with words such as *ya Allah* or *ya rabbah* (i.e., oh my God), which are pervasively used in both regional dialects and standard Arabic. These choices can functionally replace the meaning of blasphemous words used in the English version. Swear words related to God seem to be problematic to Arab translators to tackle because of the high value given to God in the Arab world. Certain religious beliefs would make these particular expressions, if translated, unacceptable to the viewer. These expressions carry certain specific notions that elevate their level of offensiveness to the level of complete rejection and more strident than the words and expressions used in the other categories of SEs. Due to this reason, 25 out of 32 instances were omitted in the subtitles.

In the instances where 'tone down' strategy is used, the three words *yalalhawl*, *bi@san,* and *tabban* are the only choices used to render religion-related SE words. These words are evasive ways to avoid mentioning God and God-related words, negatively. It is worth noting, perhaps, the existence of subtle differences in the current use of certain words related to SEs, and that oftentimes a great distinction should exist between swearing, cursing, obscenity, vulgarity, cussing, insults, degradation, and blasphemy. Some have greater repercussions: social, religious, familial, etc.

Using omission in those instances shows that the film was indeed subject to strict censorship in the Arab world. In the subtitles, vulgar words in the source language are either omitted or toned down using euphemisms. The sex category was subject to censorship in all instances. The second category that was most censored was religion, followed by excrement, politics, sexist terms of abuse, and alcohol. No evidence of censorship was found within the categories of drugs or alcohol. This may indicate that SEs vary in terms of their sensitivity across cultures, with sex being the most sensitive factor, followed by religion. The very fact that sex related words used in Western films received regular, unfailing censorship, even in relation to religion related SE words, seems significant, and not simply coincidental. The fact that sex related words and expressions are even subject to toning down, omission and other various techniques of censorship is, after all, highly due to their moral or religious rejection. This could reflect the underlying acknowledgement that in these films, there exists an underlying cultural difference that has elements, which are more influential on the society, realistically, and practically, as opposed to a negligent appeal to disrespect God, religion, or the holy. In other words, sex is a universal "need," whereas religion deals with belief. The weight that these movies hold, and the power of the messages that they convey, seems to be evident to viewers, by the very fact of complete rejection of accurate translation via functional equivalence, in this specific category.

It is worth noting that the register taxonomy across this language pair is found significantly disparate. That is, in Arabic, the level where one lowers his language choices to use these words is significantly lower and less frequent than its English counterpart.

5.0 Conclusion
A descriptive analysis of censorship using English-Arabic parallel corpus of three American movies was conducted to define the strategies adopted in films featured during the past 20 years. It was found that English-language films are being censored in the Arab world, especially when the source contains sexual material. Omission and toning down were the most frequently used strategies in the subtitle corpus. This strategy is very common, as demonstrated by Sahari (2023) and Olimat et al. (2023) who arrived at similar findings in their studies. Upgrading has also been used as a strategy for some sex-related SEs. It has also been found that functional equivalence has not been generally addressed in instances where 'tone down' is used. The analysis adopted the Pedersen (2017) Taxonomy and further complemented it with Albarakati (2023) Extended Model (provided below) which has added three more strategies to Pederson's. Analysis shows that the films were indeed subject to strict censorship in the Arab world, as the vulgar words in the source language were either omitted or toned down using euphemisms. However, a more functional strategy to be used to render SEs is to use a lower register word/phrase such as a dialectal choice. These slang choices belong to a similar level of register and have similar connotations to those of the English SEs.

The world is witnessing the emergence of new trends that are found culturally unconventional   such as the LGBTQ+ content, which has been on the rise lately. The growing impact of media can yield to globalization of many cultural aspects, especially if censorship is kept minimal. The researcher recommends that further studies on the topic investigate the degree of change in AVT censorship strategies in the mainstream media to explore new trends of AVT to mark the changes which have occurred over the past 20 years. It would also be very interesting if the present study is replicated and further investigation is conducted on this topic so that conclusions can be made on a much larger scale of time and sample; through which future perspectives can be foreseen.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

References

[1] Abdelaal, N. M. (2019). Subtitling of culture-bound terms: strategies and quality assessment. *Heliyon*, 5(4). Article e01491. https://www.doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2019.e01411

[2] Abu-Rayyash, H., Haider, A. S., & Al-Adwan, A. (2023). Strategies of translating swear words into Arabic: a case study of a parallel corpus of Netflix English-Arabic movie subtitles. *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications, 10*(1), 1-13. doi:https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-01506-3

[3] l Tamimi, Y., & Mansi, M. (2023). Subtitling Research in the Arab World. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 6(1): 01-09. https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3041-8793

[4] Alabbasi, A. (2009). Towards a Constructive Cultural Interaction Via. Audio-Visual Translation (Arabic-English). In Abdullah Hassan, Hasuria Che Omar, Haslina Haroon & A. A. Ghani (Eds.) (2009), *The Sustainability of the Translation Field* (pp. 179-189). Kula Lumpur: Persatuan Penterjemah Malaysia. Malaysian Translators Association: The 12th International Conference on Translation.

[5] Al-Adwan, A. S. (2015). Towards a model of euphemisation in Arabic subtitling. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Special Issue on Translation*, (4): 6-21.

[6] Al-Bukhari, Mohammed bin Isma'il. (2003). *Sahih Al-Bukhari*. Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir.

[7] Alfaro de Carvalho, Carolina. (2012). Quality Standards or Censorship? Language Control Policies in Cable TV Subtitles in Brazil. *Meta: Journal des Traducteurs, 57*(2): 464-477. DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1013956ar

[8] Al-Jabri, H., Allawzi, A., & Abushshmaes, A. (2021). A comparison of euphemism strategies applied by MBC and Netflix on two Arabic subtitled versions of the US sitcom How I Met Your Mother. *Heliyon 7*(2), e06262. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e06262

[9] Allan, K. & Burridge, K. (2006). *Forbidden words: Taboo and the censoring of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[10] Allan, K. (2018). *The oxford handbook of taboo words and language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[11] Alsharhan, A. (2020). Netflix no-censorship policy in subtitling taboo language from English into Arabic. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation*, 3(2): 7-28. https://doi.org/10.47476/jat.v3i2.2020.127

[12] Al-Yasin, N., & Rabab'ah, G. (2019). Arabic audiovisual translation of taboo words in American hip hop movies: a contrastive study. *Babel 65*(2): 222–248. https://doi.org/10.1075/babel.00090.aly
Andersson, L-G. & Trudgill, P. (1990). *Bad language*. London: Penguin books.

[13] Carvalho, C. (2013). Quality Standards or Censorship? Language Control Policies in Cable TV Subtitles in Brazil. *Meta: Translators' Journal, 57*(2): 464-477. https://doi.org/10.7202/1013956ar

[14] Collins Dictionary. (2023, June 13). Retrieved from https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english-thesaurus/censorship.

[15] Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.

[16] De Wever, B., Schellens, T., Valcke, M., & Van Keer, H. (2006). Content analysis schemes to analyze transcripts of online asynchronous discussion groups: A review. *Computers & education*, 46(1), 6-28.

[17] Diaz Cintas, J. D., & Remael, A. (2007). *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315759678

[18] Doherty, T. (2010). *Teenagers And Teenpics: Juvenilization Of American Films.* (revised and expanded edition). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

[19] Gamal, M. Y. (2014). Audiovisual Translation in the Arab World: Mapping the Field. *Arab Media & Society,* Issue 19: 1-12.

[20] Gamal, M. Y. (2020). Context, Field and Landscape of Audiovisual Translation in the Arab World. *ESSACHESS- Journal for Communication Studies, 13*(1): 73+. Gale Academic OneFile.gale.com/apps/doc/A631679582/AONE?u=anon~50180041&sid=googleScholar&xid=42fc5dd9.

[21] Gambier, Y. & Gottlieb, H. (2001). *(Multi) Media Translation: Concepts, practices, and research*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.34

[22] Haider, A. S., Saideen, B., & Hussein, R. F. (2023). Subtitling Taboo Expressions from a Conservative to a More Liberal Culture: The Case of the Arab TV Series Jinn. *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication, 1*(aop), 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1163/18739865-tat00006

[23] Haider, A. S., & Hussein, R. F. (2022). Modern Standard Arabic as a Means of Euphemism: A Case Study of the MSA Intralingual Subtitling of Jinn Series. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 51*(6), 628-643. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2022.2106289

[24] Hassan, A., Omar, H. Che, Haroon, H., & Ghani, A. A. (Eds.) (2009), *The Sustainability of the Translation Field*. Kula Lumpur: Persatuan Penterjemah Malaysia

[25] House, J. (1977). A Model for Assessing Translation Quality. *Meta, 22*(2): 103–109. https://doi.org/10.7202/003140ar

[26] Harwood, T. G., & Garry, T. (2003). An overview of content analysis. *The marketing review*, 3(4), 479-498.

[27] Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Sage publications.

[28] Olimat, S. N., Mahadin, D., Mashaqba, B., & Al-Adwan, A. (2023). Subtitling sensitive Arabic language for English audiences: A case study of Netflix's Jinn and Al-Rawabi shows. *Ampersand 11*(December 2023):100142. www.doi.org/10.1016/j.amper.2023.100142

[29] Pedersen, J. (2005). How is culture rendered in subtitles? In H. Gerzymisch & S. Nauert (eds.), *Challenges of multidimensional translation: Conference proceedings*. Paper presented at EU High Level Scientific Conference Series, Saarbrücken, Germany 2005 (pp. 1-18). Saarbrücken: MuTra.

[30] Pedersen, J. (2007). Cultural interchangeability: The effects of substituting cultural references in subtitling. *Perspectives: Studies in Translation Theory and Practice, 15*(1): 30-48. https://doi.org/10.2167/pst003.0

[31] Pedersen, J. (2017). The FAR model: assessing quality in interlingual subtitling. *Journal of Specialized Translation* (28): 210-229.

[32] Roberts, D. F., Henriksen, L. & Christenson, P. G. (1999). Substance Use in Popular Films and Music. *ERIC: Institute of Education Sciences*, 5-6. *http://www.health.org/govstudy/mediastudy/new.htm*

[33] Sahari, Y. M. (2023). "A Corpus-Based Study of Culturally Sensitive Terms in Subtitling Hollywood Films into Arabic." PhD thesis, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. https://figshare.mq.edu.au/articles/thesis/A_Corpus-Based_Study_of_Culturally_Sensitive_Terms_in_Subtitling_Hollywood_Films_into_Arabic/22207942

[34] Scandura, G.I. (2004). Sex, Lies, and TV: Censorship and subtitling. *Meta: Journal des traducteurs/Meta: Translators' Journal* 49(1): 125-134. http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/009028ar

[35] Sharifi, S., & Darchinyan, F. (2009). Investigating the Representation of Taboo in Translation into Persian and Its Consequences. *Linguistics and Khorasani Dialects, 1*(1): 127-149.

[36] Thawabteh, M. A. (2010). The Translatability of Interjections: A Case Study of Arabic-English Subtitling. *Meta, 55*(3): 499–515. https://doi.org/10.7202/045067ar

[37] Toury, G. (2012). Descriptive translation studies: And beyond. *Descriptive Translation Studies*, 1-366.

[38] Toury, G (1995). *Descriptive Translation Studies – And Beyond*, 2nd ed, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Appendix

Appendix 1.   Pedersen (2017) Strategies, adapted and modified by Albarakati (2023)

Pedersen (2017) Taxonomy	Albarakati (2023) Extended Model
1- Omission 2- Retention 3- Official equivalent 4- Direct translation 5- Specification 6- Generalisation 7- Substitution	8- Tone down 9- Upgrading 10- Normalizing