Problems in Subtitling Cultural-Bound Expressions in "Theeb" Movie: A Case Study[*]

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Abstract—**Subtitling is a challenging task making subtitlers use precise strategies to improve the quality of the subtitles. This paper aims at identifying the subtitling strategies employed in subtitling the culture-bound terms in the Jordanian movie entitled "Theeb" and assessing the translation of such culture-bound terms. The dialect used in this movie is the Bedouin Jordanian Arabic. So, the translator faced two dilemmas: (1) Understanding the Bedouin Jordanian-Arabic dialect and understanding the dimensions and features of this distinguished culture. (2) Translating this work, which is loaded with cultural expressions, into English. Furthermore, the study deals with the issue of overcoming the difficulties faced by translation of Arabic-language audiovisual dialogues into English. To achieve the purpose of this study, the data was collected from the movie "Theeb" and then analyzed. The results show that not all the subtitling strategies were used. Those left unused were dislocation, condensation, decimation, and resignation strategies. Hence, this article critically evaluates this subtitling, exposing pitfalls and offering more efficient renderings in a practical context.**

Index Terms—**Translation Studies, Subtitling, Cultural Expressions, Arabic/English, "Theeb" Movie**

I. INTRODUCTION

One of many ways to translate films and television programs is subtitling. Subtitling can be defined as a textual form of a dialogue displayed in films and TV programs. Subtitling is essential for films due to its contribution to their overall effect and reception. Subtitles are usually displayed at the bottom of the TV screen. Through subtitling, the audience enjoys the film by reading and understanding the translated text at the bottom of a screen clearly. We can say that subtitling is more realistic since it displays the original sound. As the main method of translating films, subtitling involves the least interference with the original. In other words, therefore, it is a way of experiencing the flavor of the foreign language. Subtitling is a way of translating a foreign film without tampering with the original soundtrack and dialogues, as in the case of dubbing.

Translating subtitle texts, dialogues or conversations in a film is a difficult task for translators. Hatim and Mason (in Venuti, 2000) point out that there are four types of difficulties related to subtitling. The first difficulty is the shift in mode from speech to writing. The second one is the factor that governs the medium or channel in which meaning is to be conveyed. The third one is the reduction of the source text, as a consequence, and last but not least is the requirement of Subtitling Strategies in "Theeb" Movie.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A. Audiovisual Translation (AVT)

In this era of globalization, the exchange of information and cultures is unavoidable, and translation across languages and cultures is a big demand. Audiovisual Translation (AVT) in the form of translating, subtitling, and dubbing in TV programs, is a new category in the field of translation. In addition to AVT, other writers consider this translation category as audiovisual language transfer, which is a concept used to identify the process through an audiovisual program containing materials in a source language translated accurately and precisely to be understood by the audience in the target language, who are foreigners to the source language (Ghaemi & Benyamin, 2011).

Typically, translation deals with one single channel which is the written one, but in Audiovisual Translation (AVT) a translator must deal with four channels as proposed by Gottlieb (1998, p. 245):
1. Verbal auditory channel
2. Non-verbal auditory channel
3. Verbal visual channel
4. Non-verbal visual channel

Meaning conveyed by the translation in the target language mainly depends on the four channels stated above, as they provide the context for the translation.

B. Subtitling

As mentioned earlier, subtitling is a translation between two languages and between modes of communication from the spoken words to the written ones. Moreover, subtitling has many difficulties in time and space constraints that may reduce how much can be said. Subtitling usually excludes words or full sentences, and the exact translation is often ignored for a more accurate translation.

In a similar vein, Vöge (1977) states that subtitling is a written translation of the film dialogue which is projected at the bottom of the screen (p. 120). Furthermore, Luyken et al. (1991) point out that subtitles are written translations of original dialogue which can be seen as lines of text, usually positioned at the foot of the screen (p. 31). Subtitles appear and disappear to coincide in time with the corresponding portion of the original dialogue and are almost always added to the screen image later as a post-production activity (Luyken et al., 1991, p. 31). Furthermore, Ivarsson & Carroll (1998) use the concept "subtitles" for texts which represent what is being said (whether they are visible, 'open' subtitles or 'closed' teletext which can be added to the picture when the viewer so wishes) (p. 4).

As mentioned above, making an excellent and relevant subtitle is a difficult task, and the translator must fully comprehend the guidelines related to subtitling. As translation strategies, subtitling strategies are the technical devices in the world of translation. However, subtitling is used for transferring the meaning of dialogues in one language into a text in another language. (Fawcett in Bogucki, 2004). In this study, the researchers rely on subtitling strategies from Gottlieb (1992): expansion, paraphrase, transfer, imitation, transcription, dislocation, condensation, decimation, deletion, and resignation (p. 166).

Subtitling and Culture

It is common to say that native speakers of a language share not only this language but also a culture for which the language serves as a medium. One of the tasks of a subtitler, hence, is translating cultural-bound expressions. Cultural references or cultural-bound expressions are usually linked to culture-specific contexts such as sociolinguistic ones, geography, and history. According to Foreman (1992) (as cited in Narváez, 2015), cultural references include culture-bound terms and signs, gestures, and symbols. Furthermore, Mayoral and Muñoz (1997, as cited in Narváez, 2015) point that these terms can be regarded as culturally marked segments. For Nedergaard-Larsen (1993), cultural references broadly include history, geography, society, and culture. From his perspective, Ramière (2004) proposes three kinds of cultural references, viz. sociocultural, historical and extralinguistic references. Vandeweghe (2005) uses the concept of cultural references in order to include geographical, ethnographic and socio-political references. In the same vein, Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007) use the concept "culture-bound terms" to refer to cultural references.

Translating culture-bound terms is very challenging. Nevertheless, the challenge is higher when it is related to subtitling. In contrast to other forms of written translation, subtitling does not allow at hand solutions to translate the difficult terms. In the other forms of translation, footnotes, glosses, and many other translation strategies can be used to convey the meaning of some culture-bound terms. However, in subtitling, all these solutions are absent (Zojer, 2011). One more problem in subtitling is lack of theory. Another problem in translating cultural references is conveying the ST meaning, as it is sometimes problematic to find out the meaning of the ST subtitles. Sometimes, one more problem is the ambiguity and lack of coherence of verbal texts such as speeches, which need to be translated faithfully or communicatively (Zojer, 2011). Other problems of translating cultural references include the emotive words, which need to be translated carefully. Therefore, this paper identifies strategies for translating subtitles, locates some problems in implementation, and offers alternatives using a pragmatic model.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims at:

1. Identifying the translation strategies used in subtitling "Theeb" movie from Arabic into English.

2. Identifying the problems that the translator of this movie encountered while translating culture-bound expressions from Arabic into English.

IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study stems from being an original attempt to tackle the problems and the strategies in subtitling a Jordanian movie from Arabic into English. "Theeb" is the first Bedouin movie and the first Jordanian film to receive an Oscar nomination. The film premiered in 2014 and was directed by Naji Abo Nowar. The title of the movie means "Wolf" in colloquial Arabic and carries ambivalent symbolism beyond our concern in this article. The researchers believe that the director introduced a masterpiece and displayed a magnificent image of the Bedouin society. Moreover, the study is significant as it contributes to directing the translations of the future Arab movies, especially those related to culture and tradition.

V. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Based on the research background of the study, the problems proposed in this research are:
1) What are the subtitling strategies applied in the movie "Theeb"?
2. What are the problems a translator might face in subtitling such movies?

VI. METHODOLOGY

A. Data Collection

The data of the research was collected from the official English subtitle of "Theeb" movie translated by Lamya Al-Khraisha who is a native speaker of Arabic language. The researchers selected 13 examples to achieve the objectives of the study.

B. Data Analysis

The study shall be conducted on the transcript of the screenplay and the subtitling which was done by Lamia Al-Khraisha. The transcript and subtitles could not be appended to this manuscript due to length and word count considerations, but we here reproduce relevant parts for this discussion. The researchers selected the examples that are loaded with cultural expressions and analyzed them based on the strategies proposed by Gottlieb (1992). The subtitling strategies are "expansion, paraphrase, transfer, transcription, imitation, dislocation, condensation, decimation, deletion, resignation" (p.166).

VII. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In this section, the researchers identify and describe the subtitling strategies and the problems the translator faced in subtitling "Theeb" movie.

Example One:

Sharif Hussein bin Ali sent Marji and Edward to ask the Sheikh of a Bedouin tribe in Wadi Rum to guide them to a Roman well on Pilgrim's Trail. In a traditional sitting in the Sheikh's tent, Marji asked the Sheikh:

-SL: لي طلب عندك يا شيخ

-TL: I have a request, Sheikh?

The Sheikh:

-SL: ابشر، حياك الله

-TL: Of course.

Marji:

-SL: أرسلنا الشريف تدلنا على البير الروماني

-TL: The Sharif said you could guide us to the Roman Well

-The Sheikh:

-SL: هذا اللي على درب الحجاج؟

-TL: On the Pilgrim's Trail?

-SL: بس هالدرب ما هي ممشية يا رجل من يوم صارت السكة

-TL: That trail's been abandoned since the railroad came

Marji:

-SL: لي ربع غاد

-TL: I have people there.

The Sheikh:

-SL: والنعم بربعك والله

-TL: With all respect.

-SL: بس ما ظل بهالدرب حجاج كلها قومان

-TL: There are more raiders than pilgrims on that trail.

In order to make an effect on the Sheikh, Marji said:

-SL: جينا على سمعة الشيخ الله يرحمه

-TL: Your father's reputation led us here.

Marji intended to remind the young Sheikh with his father, the former Sheikh of the tribe, who had a good reputation among people. So, the Sheikh said:

-SL: وصلتوا، حياكوا الله

-TL: You've arrived.

In the above example, the term (وصلتوا) is usually used in Jordan to refer to one's willingness to satisfy the listener's wish or demand. The translator, a Jordanian, translated this well-known cultural expression into "you've arrived." He/she should have been aware of such a common expression. This translation is literal and does not make any sense in the target text. However, the lexical words are again translated singly, out of context. The true translation has a deeper meaning and conveys more that someone on a trip and just arriving. The subtitler/translator should have translated (وصلتوا) into "you are welcome, will do it with pleasure."

Again, in the above example, we have the cultural expression (حياكوا الله) which means God bless you. The subtitler/translator omitted this expression. He/she did not translate it into English. The subtitler/translator should have translated this term into "Allah bless you" in order to reflect the sense and the image of this common expression which indicates warmly welcoming guests and visitors.

To further illustrate such problematic translations, let us consider the following example:

Example Two:
Marji asked The Sheikh Hmoud:
-SL: يا أخي عرب الشيخ أبو حمود وين؟
-TL: Where's Sheikh Abu Hmoud's Tribe?
The Sheikh replied:
-SL: وصلت.
-TL: You've arrived.

After dinner the guests start talking to the sheikh, explaining more about their intentions. The guest asks about the tribe of Abu Hmoud (Theeb and the Sheikh's father). The Sheikh answered with (وصلت) which is a literal translation or direct translation. The Sheikh's intention is to tell the man that you have what you're asking about, or you are now among Abu Hmoud's tribe. The dialogue is translated by transfer strategy. This strategy is used to transfer meaning of source language into target language without adding or deleting the utterance, and this strategy does not change the meaning of both source language and target language. The subtitler/translator used the Transfer strategy which refers to the strategy of translating the source text completely and correctly.

In this great scene, the director showed a magnificent habit that could be unknown even to Arab people. In the Bedouin society, neither the host nor the guest asks each other about their name except after the host made food to the guest. In this case, the translation is correct.

Example Three:
Trying to justify his dirty actions to Theeb, the stranger or the raider, began to talk about him-self. He said:
-SL: أنا عاشرت ناس من الشرق والغرب
-TL: I've met all kinds of people.
-SL: منهم الحكيم والتاجر
-TL: Anyone from wise men to merchants.

The word (الحكيم) in this context, means "the doctor who is trained to treat people who are ill" not "the wise man" who makes good decisions and gives good advices" (Longman, 2006). Unfortunately, the translator failed to understand the original text despite being a native speaker of Arabic language and a member of the source culture.

Example Four:
Usually after drinking coffee in someone's tent, the Bedouin man, the guest, says the word (عشت). It is an idiom used by Bedouin people to express thankfulness and gratitude and wish the listener health. In his turn, the host replies (تعيش). The literal meaning of the word (عشت) is "wishing someone long life". The translator did not understand the idiomatic meaning of the word in the source text; therefore, he/ she translated it literally as follows:
Al Sheikh Hmoud said to his brother Hussein:
-SL: قهوة يا حسين.
-TL: Coffee, Hussein.
Hussein replied:
-SL: إيه والله.
-TL: Coming.
Marji said:
-SL: الله يمسيكوا بالخير جميع. كيف حالكوا، شلونكوا؟
-TL: Good evening to you all.
Hussein gave Marji and Edward the coffee. Marji drank it and said:
-SL: عشت.
-TL: A long life.
Hussein replied:
-SL: تعيش.
-TL: And to you.

In example four, we have the cultural expression (عشت). The subtitler/ translator translated this term literally into "a long life." The translator should have translated (عشت) into "thank you." Such errors in subtitling can ruin the subtitles for most viewers. Moreover, this error may hamper comprehension and disrupt the coherence of the text. One more point, the subtitler/translator did not translate the expression (شلونكوا) which means "how are you?" Indeed, omission is one of the strategies used in subtitling culture-bound expressions. The subtitler/translator opted to delete this expression and did not compensate it. We believe that omission can be made followed by compensation to compensate the space left on the screen. Otherwise, the viewers will lose track of the scene and lose enjoyment.

To better prove our argument and add more substance to it, let us also consider the following example:
Example Five:

As we have mentioned above, the raider tried to justify his dirty actions to Theeb. In the same context, the raider said:

-SL: ولفيت ديار كثيرة.

-TL: I've travelled all over.

-SL: رحت للقدس و الشام.

TL: I've seen Jerusalem and El-Sham.

In the above example, we have the proper name (الشام) Damascus. The subtitler/translator translated it by using transliteration strategy. This proper name has a translation in English language which is "Damascus." The translator should have translated (الشام) into "Damascus." In Arab culture, (الشام) means "Damascus" even though it could be expanded to include all the Levant countries (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan). But in this context, as we can see, (الشام) refers to "Damascus" because it is joined with Jerusalem which is considered a part of the Levant cities. Indeed, Arab people who live in Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine call "Damascus" (الشام). In fact, the use of the name of another city (Jerusalem) in the same immediate context hints that El-Sham here refers to the city of Damascus.

Example Six:

Theeb and Hussein got up the mountain. The raiders surrounded them and began to use the war of nerves tactic, trying to strike fear into their hearts:

-SL: ناموا، تريحوا يا رجال.

-TL: Get some sleep, brothers.

-SL: لا تناموا يا ذياب!

-TL: Don't sleep little doggies!

-SL: يا ولد والله تقول الربع انخمدوا!

-TL: Hey, I think they've really fallen asleep!

-SL: خمدة.

-TL: They're dreaming.

In the above example, the translator translated (انخمدوا) into "they've really fallen asleep" which is acceptable, but translating (خمدة) into "they're dreaming" is not acceptable. In Arabic language, (خمدة) means wishing somebody death. The translator did not notice the way the raider said this word. In this case, the translator should have translated (خمدة) into a wish that they die or undergo eternal sleep. The subtler/translator used the generalization strategy. He/she translated (خمدة) into a more polite euphemistic word phrase "they are dreaming."

Example Seven:

ST:

مرجي: لي طلب عندك يا شيخ

الشيخ: ابشر حياك الله

TT:

Marji: I have a request Sheikh?

Sheikh: Of course

"Marji" wants a favor from the Sheikh, and the Sheikh answers with "ابشر حياك الله". The subtitler/translator translated (ابشر حياك الله) into "of course". The term (ابشر) refers to obligation. Bedouins usually link their answers with Islamic expressions, where they praise Allah in each utterance. In the above example, they connect their answer (ابشر) with (حياك الله). The subtitler/translator does not convey the same sense and image into the target language. He/she translated it into "of course." In order to convey the same image, the translator should have translated it into "Allah bless you, will do it with pleasure." In other words, he/she should have followed the dislocation strategy to maintain the effect and the sense of the image of the source text.

Example Eight:

ST:

الشيخ: رح نتواجه إن شاء الله

مرجي: يا الله بخاطرك يا شيخ

TT:

Al sheikh: Soon, God willing

Marji: With your permission sheikh

In the above example, we have the colloquial expression (بخاطرك يا شيخ) translated literally into "with your permission." The subtitler/translator is not familiar with the Bedouin culture. The term is not translated accurately by the subtitler; thus, a meaningless and senseless translation has been made. The subtitler/translator should have translated the above term functionally into "Please excuse me (I need to go)", or even simply "Goodbye."

Example Nine:

ST:

قاطع الطريق: الكف ما يناطح مخرز

TT:

The raider: you can't stop a spear with your hand

The raider and "Theeb" see all the dead revolutionaries after the battle with the Ottomans. The raider comments with a proverb, which is a metaphor, to highlight how unfair the battle was for the revolutionaries. The literal meaning is

"you can't fight a dagger with your bare hand." The subtitler/translator chose cultural equivalence for this proverb to create a familiar and intense effect. This equivalence can also be described as dynamic since it created the same effect in the target language and evoked a similar image in the receptor's mind. The translator employed the condensation strategy. He/she manages to retain both meaning and most of the stylistic features of the original.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study aimed at identifying the subtitling strategies adopted in subtitling the Bedouin movie "Theeb" which was released in 2014. For this purpose, the data was collected from the movie and analyzed using Gottlieb (1992) subtitling strategies. The results of the study have shown that some of the strategies proposed by Gottlieb were used (condensation, decimation, transfer, imitation, and deletion), but the other strategies were totally ignored. Furthermore, the translation of the movie did not reflect an adequate absorption of the Bedouin dialect and Arab-Islamic culture. Moreover, the study has shown that there were some serious errors or problems that can ruin the subtitles for viewers and make the subtitles sound unnatural. These errors occurred due to not translating the culture-bound expressions functionally, which affected conveying meaning. Hence, we tried to suggest more accurate or more apt renderings that work better for the designated context. Finally, further studies on subtitling such movies (i.e. Bedouin ones) are still needed. In other words, the researchers believe that there are not enough studies on audiovisual translation, particularly translating dialect. Hence, we hope that this study may lead to more research in this regard. And since translation is a bridge among cultures and languages, sensitivity to culture-bound expressions serves this noble mission of translation.

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