Strategies and Sensitivities in Arabic Subtitling of Taboos in Horror TV Series

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الملخص

تستكشف هذه الورقة الترجمة العربية للمحظورات (taboos) في مسلسلات الرعب التلفزيونية من خلال دراسة كيفية قيام المترجمين بالتنقل بين التوازن الدقيق والحفاظ على التأثير العاطفي المقصود لهذا النوع من اللغة والالتزام بالمحاذير الدينية والثقافية العربية المرتبطة بالجمهور الناطق باللغة العربية. تنفذ الدراسة تحليلًا نوعيًا لمجموعة مختارة من النصوص من مسلسلات الرعب التلفزيونية باللغة الإنجليزية (ST) والتي تمت ترجمتها إلى اللغة العربية (TT) من خلال كل من المترجمين التجاريين ومترجمي الإنترنت (الهواة). اعتمد الإطار التحليلي بشكل أساسي على مفهوم جيدون توري لتوضيح كيف يمكن أن تؤثر الاستراتيجيات/المناهج المختلفة على التأثير العاطفي للمحظورات في نقل النص. يساهم هذا البحث في فهم كيف يمكن أن تكون الوظيفة المقصودة من TT مختلفة عن تلك التي يقصدها ST، وهو جانب من جوانب "نظرية Skopos". تبحث الدراسة في هذه الأسئلة البحثية: كيف يتعامل المترجمون العرب مع ترجمة المحظورات في مسلسلات/أفلام الرعب التلفزيونية، مع الأخذ في الاعتبار الحساسيات الثقافية والدينية، وما هي الاستراتيجيات المستخدمة للحفاظ على التأثير العاطفي المقصود للمحرمات. أُخضعت المحظورات التي تم تحليلها لهذه المعايير: يجب أن تكون اللفظة صريحة في النص الأصلي وأن تستخدم كمحظور وليست لسد فجوة المحادثة؛ وليست هناك حاجة لتحليل كل مثال على كل محظور إذا كانت متشابهة في السياق أو الوظيفة. خلصت الدراسة إلى أن المترجمين التجاريين ومترجمي الإنترنت يميلون إلى استخدام العبارات الملطفة والحذف عند نقل معظم المحظورات الإنجليزية. وقد وجد أيضًا أن مترجمي الإنترنت كانوا في بعض الحالات أكثر شجاعة لأنهم يميلون إلى الحفاظ على التأثير العاطفي المقصود للترجمة النصية من خلال ترجمة المحظورات.

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Abstract

This paper explores Arabic translation of taboos in horror TV series by examining how translators navigate the delicate balance between preserving the intended emotional impact of this type of language and adhering to religious and Arabic cultural norms associated with the Arabic-speaking audience. The study implements a qualitative analysis of a select corpus of texts from a horror TV series in English (ST) which has been translated into Arabic (TT) by both commercial subtitlers and cybersubtitlers. The analytical framework relied mainly on Toury's notion of norms to illustrate how different strategies/approaches may affect the emotional impact of taboos in TT. This research contributes to the understanding of how the function intended by the TT may be different from those intended by the ST, which is an aspect of 'Skopos theory'. The study investigates these research questions: 1) how do Arabic translators handle the translation of taboos in horror TV series/movies, considering cultural and religious sensitivities? 2) What strategies are employed to maintain the ST's intended emotional impact of taboos? The taboos in the analyzed corpus were subjected to these criteria: they must be explicit in the ST and used as a taboo and not a conversational gap filler; there is no need to analyze each example of each taboo if they are similar in context and function. It was found that commercial subtitlers and cybersubtitlers tend to use euphemisms and deletions when rendering most English taboos. It was also found that cybersubtitlers were, in some cases, more

courageous as they tend to keep some of the ST's intended emotional impact by translating taboos.

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Introduction

Horror movies and TV series as a genre are renowned for their ability to evoke fear through the employment of profanity or taboo language as a tool to intensify emotional impact. However, cultural, linguistic, and religious nuances can considerably affect the use of profanity in translated works, making the implementation of an appropriate plan and/or method for translating swearing in horror films a sensitive task. This is particularly difficult when translating between a language pair that differs on numerous linguistic and cultural levels, like English and Arabic. This language pair is deemed 'distant', and these differences between Arabic and English, which stem from the languages' different histories and familial origins (Raheem et al., 2023), can pose challenges in translation, communication, and cultural understanding (Elhadary, 2023). Examining subtitling, an audiovisual translation (AVT) medium is known for its exceptional ability to handle delicate linguistic and cultural elements— particularly when it comes to culturally specific taboos in genres like horror—should be beneficial when concentrating on this language pair, English/Arabic.

Since taboos vary among cultures, what is taboo in for one culture may not be in the eyes of another. Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2021) define taboo or swearwords as "expressions whose use is restricted or prohibited by social custom" (p. 181). From a linguistic perspective, Allan and Burridge (2006, p. 1) include as taboo:

> bodies and their effluvia (sweat, snot, faeces, menstrual fluid, etc.); the organs and acts of sex, micturition and defecation; diseases, death and killing (including hunting and fishing); naming, addressing, touching and viewing persons and sacred beings, objects and places; food gathering, preparation and consumption.

Yule (2014) described taboo words as words and phrases that people in society use inappropriately.

For Arabic speakers, taboo refers to language, topics, or issues that are (a) prohibited, stigmatized, or forbidden, (b) related to social or religious teachings, or (c) considered offensive (Abi-Esber, 2017; Alsharhan, 2020; Khalaf & Rashid, 2016, 2019). Within the context of subtitling, taboo language is sensitive because subtitling as an AVT medium involves migration from verbal to written form. This is because of a belief that taboo's impact "…is more offensive when written than when verbalized, which in turn tends to lead to the systematic deletion and down-toning of most 'effing and blinding' in the subtitles." (Díaz-Cintas, 2013, p. 278). In Arab culture, jokes with sexual associations, or taboos, that are commonly used in Western productions are not favored on screens (Alharthi, 2016) due to the aforementioned shift a subtitled taboo naturally undertakes from spoken to written language. For the purposes of

uniformity, from this point, this study shall adopt the term 'taboos' as encompassing swearwords, profane, or blasphemous references.

Furthermore, this study adopts and advocates for the term cybersubtitling instead of the more prominent but flawed terms: amateur subtitles, fansubs, or crowdsourced subtitles. Díaz-Cintas (2018) asserts that the term cybersubtitles includes the different varieties of subtitles online in a transparent way and these cybersubtitles may be requested, crowdsourced for example, or produced voluntarily. Moreover, individuals who produce cybersubtitles can be either amateurs or professionals. What is referred to here as cybersubtitling belongs to the wider AVT family that includes many forms of AVTs such as dubbing, subtitling, scripting, and closed captioning (Díaz-Cintas, 2018), but the focus here shall remain on the subtitling domain.

As a term, cybersubtitling is certainly not the exclusive term used by AVT scholars; however, it is used here because it best employs reference to the web as opposed to, for example, presumptions about the skill of the subtitlers (Aljammaz, 2022). Díaz-Cintas (2018, p. 129) describes cybersubtitling as "…subtitling on the web…", which explains the inclusion of the word *cyber* to refer to the digital space of the internet. In contrast to other terms that assume the goals behind their generation, like volunteer subtitling or fansubbing, or terms that assume non-professionalism, like amateur subtitling, using the term "cyber" to refer to the internet thus links the subtitles to the location where they are created and consumed. Therefore, the term cybersubtitling is a much-appreciated deviation from other terms that are based on, incorporate, or suggest complex concepts such as professionalism, quality, or volunteerism all of which do not have an undisputed definition. In addition to its straightforward definition, cybersubtitles is a broad term to includes different types of subtitles that are all found on the internet, including 1) fansubs, 2) guerrilla subtitles, and 3) altruist subtitles (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021).

Alternatively, this study uses the term commercial subtitles to refer to subtitles produced or commissioned through a subtitling agency, TV network, or media streaming service (e.g., Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+, etc.) with permission of the copyright holder(s). Such subtitles are intended for commercial use; however, the commercial facet in the adopted term refers to the environment and purpose for which these types of subtitles are produced and not the assertion that those who produced them received a monetary reward. This is based on the argument that some cybersubtitles may also receive payment to cybersubtitle as proven by previous research (e.g., Orrego-Carmona, 2015; Sajna, 2013). The term commercial subtitling evades implying that the producers of these subtitles as 'professionals', because it is a difficult criterion to measure as argued earlier.

To address these gaps, this study explores the following research questions: 1) how do Arabic translators handle the translation of taboos in horror TV series/movies, considering cultural and religious sensitivities? 2) what strategies are employed to maintain the ST's intended emotional impact of taboos?

Literature Review

For the past 20 years or so, AVT has been one of the most research-attracting areas of study in the field of TS, if not the most researched one (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021). Subtitling has been, and remains, the focal point of this interest, as it is considered one of the most

significant modes of AVT (cf. Bogucki, 2020; Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021; Dwyer, 2017; Pedersen, 2017). Translating taboos is challenging in written forms of translation and the challenge is increased in subtitling. In addition to the nature of subtitling having spatial and textual constraints (Gottlieb, 1994) specifically, textual challenges in the form of dealing with culture-specific items (CSIs) (Pedersen, 2005, 2011; Zojer, 2011) including, taboos.

Pedersen's (2005, 2011) pivotal work on the classification of subtitling strategies for CSIs addressed the translation problem of CSIs, and taboos, for the subtitling medium. Pederson proposed a model for subtitling strategies when dealing with CSIs. Pedersen's model includes retention, specification, direct translation, generalization, substitution, omission, or the use of 'official equivalent' (2005). Pedersen also investigated the constraints that may influence a subtitler's choice of strategy and suggested a few medium-specific constraints and paratextual considerations.

Subtitling, unlike other forms of written translation, does not provide easily accessible resolutions for terms that are difficult to translate. In his investigation, Zojer (2011) claims that written forms of translation benefit from the use of footnotes, glosses, and other translation strategies that help explain some taboos whereas in subtitling, such methods are not offered (Zojer, 2011). Furthermore, Zojer (2011, p. 400) postulates that "due to the enormous restrictions involved in the subtitling process and the shortened and often radically changed outcome, the status of subtitling as a 'proper' translation has not yet been universally accepted."

As for research within the scope of the English/Arabic language pair, earlier studies show varying approaches and strategies in the translation of taboos into Arabic but generally confirm that they are often toned down in Arabic commercial subtitles using authorization, or even deletion if space is limited. In their findings, Khalaf and Rashid's (2016) reported that the most common strategies used to alleviate swearwords' obscenity are deletion, change of semantic fields, register shift and the use of archaic words, euphemistic expressions, generalization and linguistic substitution, and ambiguity.

But more significantly, they observed that cybersubtitlers are "… abiding by norms in the target culture" (Khalaf & Rashid, 2016, p. 303). Abdelaal (2019) found that for commercial subtitlers and cybersubtitlers, translation by using euphemisms in the target text (TT) is common because people tend not to talk discuss, watch, or listen to sex-related media explicitly. This finding coincides with the aforementioned Arabic speakers' norm of opposing taboos when they appear on screens in writing. Khalaf and Rashid's and Abdelaal's studies, although valuable in their contribution, still require further investigation with specific consideration to the context of the AVT and/or genre of the production in question.

Similarly, Alharthi (2016) observed that paraphrasing, euphemizing, and generalizing are the most prevalent strategies used in the Arabic commercial subtitling for the American sitcom Seinfeld (David & Seinfeld, 1989–1998) with regards to humorous texts. Alharthi states that these strategies and approaches were implemented because humor in Seinfeld contains cultural references and linguistic nuances that are challenging to translate due to the differences between the source and target language from a cultural and linguistic point of view. Alsharhan (2020) investigated Netflix's no-censorship policy and found that many of the examined taboo instances were still euphemized despite Netflix's policy. Alharthi and Alsharhan's works further

emphasize the need to extend the scope of investigation for taboos, which is what the current paper intends to achieve.

Consequently, taboo language in general and within certain texts in particular always requires special attention from the translator (Al-Yasin & Rabab'ah, 2019; Alsharhan, 2020; Khakshour Forutan & Modarresi, 2018) and possibly a different approach compared to that used for the translation of non-sensitive language. It is therefore intriguing to examine the translational approaches and/or methods and their possible impact on the resulting TT.

This paper investigates the intriguing phenomenon of Arabic horror translations of taboos, examining how translators navigate the delicate balance between preserving the intended emotional impact of this type of language and adhering to Islamic and Arabic cultural norms associated with the Arabic-speaking audience. This research contributes to the broader knowledge of translation theory, particularly in the context of culturally specific taboos in genres like horror. It also offers insights into the challenges faced and strategies employed by translators working with culturally divergent texts.

Methods

The study adopts a qualitative analysis of a select corpus of texts as a textual analysis of selected texts from a horror TV series in English (ST) translated into Arabic (TT) by both commercial and cyber subtitlers. The analysis will include a ST/TT comparison of commercial and cybersubtitlers' work using descriptive translation studies (DTS) (Toury, 1995) approach. This involves examining the translation of horror TV series/ movies, focusing on From (Griffin, 2022–Present), a TV series on Netflix's weekly top ten lists of the most watched TV and films in countries around the world (more on the ST shortly).

The analysis may resort to comparing translations made by Arabic cybersubtitlers and Arabic commercial subtitlers relying on Toury's notion of norms (1980, 1995) to illustrate how different strategies/approaches may affect the emotional impact of taboos in the TT. The aim is to respond to the study's research questions which investigate Arabic translators' translation of taboos in horror films and the strategies they employ to maintain the intended emotional impact of taboos. Answering these inquiries will contribute to the understanding of how the function intended by the TT may be different from those intended by the ST (Nord, 2016), which is an aspect of 'Skopos theory' (Vermeer, 1978).

Skopos theory first appeared in an article published by linguist Hans Josef Vermeer (1978) and suggests that it is the skopos (Greek for "purpose") of the translation process that informs the translator's choice of strategy: either to keep to the ST's form and style and 'document' any one of the ST features or characteristics, such as language, style, norms, genre conventions, worldview, etc. or to make the TT work as a functional communication medium that relies on the audience's knowledge presuppositions, their needs and expectations regarding language, style, norms, conventions, worldview, etc.

Keeping the data manageable is extremely important to a study like ours as it deals with very specific language and a technical AVT that requires attention to detail. Along these lines, this is why Díaz-Cintas describes how some studies adopting a descriptive approach to AVT are ostentatious as they try to analyze corpora of texts that are too vast (2004). As a result, the

current study focuses on horror as a form of challenging content to keep the scope manageable, relevant, and concise. Furthermore, the choice of ST to be analyzed is deliberately kept precise as this allows further analysis of the nuances of translation and language rather than a massive general account of a translation.

From (Griffin, 2022–Present)

Following Díaz-Cintas' previously mentioned suggestion about keeping the text corpus manageable, a total of ten episodes comprising the complete first season of *From* (Griffin, 2022–Present) were chosen to be analyzed for the textual analysis. The episode is from a show called *From* (Griffin, 2022–Present), an American science fiction horror TV series. The series reveals the mystery of a frightening town in Middle America that confines all those who enter. It follows the lives of the residents who endeavor to survive terrifying creatures and hidden secrets that appear at night from the surrounding forest. The reasons behind choosing this particular audiovisual content as a ST for the textual analysis are: a) it is recent, allowing a fresh perspective into the analysis instead of including outdated content that may reveal outdated approaches to translating taboos; b) according to Netflix's weekly top ten lists of the most watched TV and films, *From* (Griffin, 2022–Present) is on the list for Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, and Saudi Arabia and has remained on the list for at least twenty weeks; c) the show suits the current study's investigation being a horror genre; and d) the show has ample examples of taboos involving both cultural and religious sensitivities following a survey of the show's English script.

A total of ten episodes comprising the complete first season of *From* (Griffin, 2022–Present) were analyzed and several examples were chosen from these episodes to handle a manageable body of data. Taboos from these episodes were identified for the textual analysis becoming the scope of the analysis. This resulted in a total of 184 cases of taboos (see **Error! R eference source not found.** below). Due to our study's qualitative design, it is not possible to include the analysis of all these taboos. This led to the need for inclusion and exclusion criteria. The analyzed taboos must be explicit in the ST and used as a taboo word instead of a remark or a conversational gap filler. Additionally, if several examples of the same taboo word were used and translated in similar contexts, then there is no need to analyze each case. Finally, instances were chosen based on their relativity to the current study's aims.

Each episode was subjected to a word-by-word search to identify a list of predetermined taboos. These taboos include these words: *fuck*, *shit*, *ass*, and *damn*. These were chosen because they have sexual, blasphemous, or offensive connotations/denotations for Arabic and English speakers too. These words are regarded as taboo if translated literally into Arabic in certain contexts because they revolve around topics such as religious blasphemy or swearing. As mentioned earlier, for Arabs, jokes with sexual associations are not favored on screens due to the shift a subtitled taboo goes through from spoken to written language.

Analysis and Discussion

In this section, several examples of translated taboos are presented and analyzed. Taboo as a theme for my textual analysis includes a list of five taboo words mentioned earlier. Subtitling taboos in a certain way may entail a risk of societal condemnation of the commercial

subtitler or cybersubtitler, especially if such taboos go against the viewers' beliefs. The upcoming examples reveal how translators negotiate these obstacles and address the current study's first research question, how do Arabic translators handle the translation of taboos in the horror genre, considering cultural and religious sensitivities? The textual examples also help in answering the second research question, what strategies are employed to maintain the ST's intended emotional impact of taboos?

Following a word-by-word search of all ten episodes of the first season of the horror TV series From (Griffin, 2022–Present), several taboo instances were identified (see Table 1 below).

Table 1

Total Taboos in the First Season of the TV Series "From" (2022–Present)

Taboo	Rate of occurrence
Fuck (or variants)	130
shit	28
Damn (or variants)	21
Ass (or variants)	5
Fuck (or variants)	130
Total	184

Further analysis followed and more than a dozen examples were chosen to be presented in the analysis here. The main criterion for inclusion and exclusion is avoiding repetition of the same taboo word that was used in a similar ST context and eventually translated similarly in all TT versions. Taboos were then examined and categorized according to their type and, more importantly, their translation and intended message were analyzed.

The following examples illustrate instances of taboos commercially subtitled and cybersubtitled. The examples include these taboos or a version of them: fuck, shit, ass, and damn. As previously mentioned, these taboos have sexual, blasphemous, or offensive connotations/denotations for Arabic and English speakers too. They are regarded as taboo if translated literally or to their formal Arabic equivalence in certain contexts because they revolve around topics such as religious blasphemy or swearing. Formal equivalence is described as a word-for-word translation that describes the translation of words and phrases in a literal way (Nida & Taber, 1969).

Table 2

Taboo Example 'fuck'

Context	One of the characters in the show wakes up another because they want to leave before dark.			
ST (episode 1) (00:05:02)	**Comsub. 1**	**Comsub. 2**	**Cybersub. 1**	**Cybersub. 2**
Frank! Get the fuck up!	"فرانك"! انهض!	(فرانك)، استيقظ	فرانك! عليك اللعنة!	(فرانك)، إستيّقظ

Back translation of taboo(s)	"deleted"	"deleted"	Curse you/damn you	"deleted"

Table 2 is an interesting example of the various approaches to translating the taboo English word 'fuck'. All subtitled versions but one chose to delete the taboo following the Arabic commercial subtitling norm for such a word. As for Cybersub. 1, they have adopted the substitution method to possibly tone down the obscenity and taboo's reference to vulgar connotations by replacing it with a taboo that has different and possibly less offensive connotations to Arabic speakers. Rendering the taboo ST to an Arabic equivalent that relates to 'curse' or 'damn' is viewed as a way of preserving the ST's intended message of conveying the emotion of frustration, which is an emotion that is conserved in the Arabic version by Cybersub. 1.

A taboo carrying both cultural and religious sensitivities, 'fuck' and its variants are rarely translated in a way that delivers that word's English connotations. Particularly, only when it is translated to its formal equivalence which is labeled as word-for-word translation, that the taboo 'fuck' has a TT emotional impact that resembles that of the ST. The ST taboo 'fuck' and its variants are usually toned downed when translated into Arabic as reported by Alharthi (2016). Alharthi claims that the word 'fuck' is often subtitled in this way by most subtitlers:

Table 3

Total Taboos in the First Season of the TV Series "From" (2022–Present)

Taboo word	Arabic commercial equivalent (commercial norm)	Back translation of Arabic commercial equivalent	Approach
Fuck (sexual act)	يضاجع	To sleep with	Euphemism
Fuck you (insult)	تباً لك	Could be 'damn', 'hell', or 'curse'	Euphemism
Fucking (Adjective)	لعين	Damn	Substitution

It is therefore refreshing that the Cybersub. 1 from Table 2 has attempted to keep some of the taboo's connotations and did not choose to use the most severe tone-down approach, deletion. Deletion would have severely altered the ST's intended message and, more importantly, its emotional effect on the viewer. In an ideal world, the taboo 'fuck' should have been translated into Arabic in a literal way, formal equivalence, that would have kept its ST's intended emotional impact but at least in our example from Table 2 some of its effect is preserved.

Table 4

Taboo Example 'fuck'

Context	One character is urging the other to hurry up and not be late.

ST (episode 1) (00:05:16)	Comsub. 1	Comsub. 2	Cybersub. 1	Cybersub. 2

	Comsub. 1	Comsub. 2	Cybersub. 1	Cybersub. 2
You nail the motherfucking windows shut, Frank!	تبًا. ستقتلك "لورين".	ستقتلك تباً (لورين)	أوه ، **اللعنة**. سيقتلك لورين.	ستقتلك **اللعنة** (لورين)
Back translation of taboo(s)	Damn/hell/ curse	Damn/hell/ curse	Curse/damn	Curse/damn

Table 4 is another example of the taboo English word 'fuck'. In this example, however, all subtitles show an attempt to translate the taboo word and not omit it entirely as seen in the previous example. In this example, both commercial subtitlers have euphemized the taboo whereas both cybersubtitlers substituted the taboo word with another. It seems that both approaches have retained the intended ST message but the cybersubtitled versions have kept most of the ST's connotations in a less toned-down version compared to the commercial subtitlers.

Table 5

Taboo Example 'fuck'

Context	After realizing that Frank did not properly close the windows, another character is blaming him for that.			
ST (episode 1) (00:12:44)	**Comsub. 1**	**Comsub. 2**	**Cybersub. 1**	**Cybersub. 2**
You nail the motherfucking windows shut, Frank!	عليك إغلاق النوافذ **اللعينة** بالمسامير يا "فرانك"!	عليك أن تغلق النوافذ بالمسامير تغلق النوافذ **اللعينة** بالمسامير يا (فرانك)	عليّك أن تُغلق النوافذ بالمسامير تُغلق النوافذ **اللعينة** بالمسامير يا (فرانك)	عليكم أن تغلقوا النافذة بالمسامير أنت تغلق النافذة **اللعينة** بالمسامير يا فرانك!
Back translation of taboo(s)	Cursed/ demand	Cursed/ demand	Cursed/ demand	Cursed/ demand

Table 5 illustrates a similar example to what has been done in rendering the ST word 'fuck' as in the previous example from Table 4. Here the taboo word is a different variation and serves a different function. The ST word 'motherfucking' was used here as an adjective to express frustration and anger. Despite this variation, it seems that all translations followed the subtitling norm (Table 3) when it comes to the variants of the taboo 'fuck', and they all euphemized it in this example. All translators appear to agree that euphemism is the best approach in this case as opposed to translating the taboos literally, which would have conveyed the most emotional effect in the TT. This may stem from the view that the ST taboo here is serving as an adjective that describes a noun and should be rendered as so, albeit with a euphemized one.

Table 6

Taboo Example 'fuck'

Context	The characters are discussing a past incidence involving a child.

ST (episode 3) (00:22:53)	Comsub. 1	Comsub. 2	Cybersub. 1	Cybersub. 2
- Holy fuck.	- يا للهول.	يا للهول	اللعنة	يا إلهي
Back translation of taboo(s)	Oh my	Oh my	Cursed/ demand	Oh my God

Table 6 shows an example where the taboo word 'fuck' was euphemized severely in all versions except one. Although Cybersub. 1's version was euphemized; it still showed an attempt to preserve the emotional impact of the ST.

Table 7

Taboo Example 'asshole'

Context	The characters are discussing a past incidence involving a child.			
ST (episode 1) (00:45:31)	**Comsub. 1**	**Comsub. 2**	**Cybersub. 1**	**Cybersub. 2**
That asshole handcuffed to the car gives you any trouble, you cut him loose.	إن تسبب لك ذلك **السافل** المقيد بالسيارة بأي مشكلات، فأطلق سراحه.	إذا سبب لك ذلك المقيد **الوغد** بالسيارة أي مشاكل فيمكنك إطلاق سراحه	هذا **الأحمق** المقيّد إذا سبب للسيارة لك أي مشكلة قم بتقطيعه	إذا سبب لك ذلك **الوغد** المقيد بالسيارة أي مشاكل فيمكنك اطلاق سراحه
Back translation of taboo(s)	bastard/ scoundrel	bastard/ scoundrel	idiot	bastard/ scoundrel

The analysis moves on to another taboo, 'ass', and its variants. Table 7 demonstrates an instance where the translation euphemizes the ST taboo word 'asshole' and consequently alters the ST's message. The ST word 'asshole' was toned down in all versions of the Arabic translation in varying degrees.

Table 8

Taboo Example 'asshole'

Context	One character explains how his sister shot one of the creatures.			
ST (episode 2) (00:29:29)	**Comsub. 1**	**Comsub. 2**	**Cybersub. 1**	**Cybersub. 2**
She never did have much patience for assholes.	ظننت أن أختي كانت ستصدم ذلك **اللعين.**	ظننت بأن أختي ستدهس **البائس العاهرة.**	ظننت أن أختي ستدوس فوق ابن **العاهرة.**	ظننت بأن أختي ستدهس **اللعين**

Back translation of taboo(s)	Cursed/ demand	The miserable	Son of a bitch	Cursed/ demand

Similar to Table 7, this is an example of the translation of the taboo word 'asshole'. Like the previous example, most versions were toned down except for Cybersub. 1 where they opted for a more derogatory TT compared to the others. For both examples from Table 7 and Table 8, it is difficult to measure which Arabic equivalent out of the above translations is more, or less, offensive or closer to the intended message. Still, it is noticeable that all versions have euphemized the culturally sensitive ST taboo.

Table 9

Taboo Example 'shit'

Context	As the characters drive, they are surprised by a tree in the middle of the road.			
ST (episode 1) **(00:15:19)** Shit.	**Comsub. 1** تبًّا	**Comsub. 2** بئسأ	**Cybersub. 1** اللعنة	**Cybersub. 2** تبًّا
Back translation of taboo(s)	Shame/ misery /curse	Shame/ misery /curse	Curse/damn	Shame/ misery /curse

As for the taboo 'shit', it seems that euphemism is a favorite choice as is the case with the previous examples. Table 9 illustrates an example of how the ST taboo word 'shit' was rendered in a similar euphemistic approach in all versions but in varying degrees. The version that stands out is Cybersub. 1's version as they used the Arabic equivalent اللعنة (English: curse/damn) which despite being euphemistic, still carries more taboo connotations than other TTs. The Arabic equivalent اللعنة moves away from the literal meaning associated with the ST taboo 'shit', which links the word to excrement or feces to a different taboo but remains a taboo, nonetheless. Cybersub. 1's translation remains within the realm of taboo by introducing the notion of cursing and/or damning, which is a religious taboo in itself to most Arabic speakers especially when it is noted that Arabs are largely Muslims (Khalil, 2013).

Table 10

Taboo Example 'shit'

Context	This is one of the characters reactions as they drive there vehicle over a spike strip.			
ST (episode 1) **(00:49:08)**	**Comsub. 1**	**Comsub. 2**	**Cybersub. 1**	**Cybersub. 2**

Shit! Shit! Shit, shit, shit.	تبًا.	بئسأ، بئسأ، بئسأ	اللعنة! اللعنة! تبأ ، تبأ ، تبأ ، تبأ ، تبأ ، تبأ.	سحقٍّ! سحقٍّ! سحقٍّ، سحقٍّ
Back translation of taboo(s)	Shame/ misery /curse	Shame/ misery	Curse/damn and Shame/ misery /curse	Damn/hell/ curse

This is another example of the previous ST taboo. In Table 10 the ST taboo 'shit' was translated following the subtitling Arabic norm to euphemize such taboo by all of the translations analyzed. As seen in Table 9, the ST taboo in the current example was not translated literally to its Arabic formal equivalence and is toned down. What is different about this example is that the ST taboo is repeated for maximum emotional impact, which is a feature that is important to convey in the translation. Despite the importance of repetition in this example, Comsub. 1 did not convey this linguistic feature, adding a further layer to the toning-down approach they adopted. Neglecting such an important linguistic feature enhanced the intensity of the euphemism approach and further moved the TT's emotional impact away from the ST's intended one.

Table 11

Taboo Example 'damn'

Context	This is one of the characters' remarks as they try to cover and hide their vehicle.			
ST (episode 1) **(00:31:35)**	**Comsub. 1**	**Comsub. 2**	**Cybersub. 1**	**Cybersub. 2**
Last thing we need is a goddamn RV barreling through town.	لسنا نريد حافلة حفلات تسير في بسرعة عالية البلدة.	آخر شيء نريده هو مركبة ترفيهية تنطلق بسرعة عبر البلدة	آخر شيء نحتاجه هو عربة سكن متنقلة **ملعونة** تتنقل عبر المدينة.	آخر شيء نريده هو مركبة ترفيهية تنطلق بسرعة عبر البلدة
Back translation of taboo(s)	"deleted"	"deleted"	Curse/damn	"deleted"

In a more religious sensitivity, the current example analyzes the taboo 'damn' and, more particularly, its severely religiously problematic version 'goddamn'. Table 11 demonstrates how the ST taboo 'goddamn' was translated in a similar euphemizing fashion as seen in all analyzed previous taboo examples. As is the case in previous instances, it is noticed that the norm is to either adopt euphemisms or deletion by most translators to Arabic as they render English cultural and religious taboos. According to Al-Adwan (2009) (as cited in Eldalees et al., 2017), deletion as a severe form of euphemizing is one of the persistent trends in subtitling English films and sitcoms into Arabic. It is however noticeable that cybersubtitlers seem to challenge such a norm and proceed to render the ST taboo in a less euphemistic sense. Specifically, Cybersub. 1's translation form Table 11 shows how they challenged the norm and did not shy away from the

ST's religious tabooness. This is seen as yet another example of cybersubtitlers attempting to retain the ST's intended emotional impact of taboos.

Table 12

Taboo Example 'damn'

Context	One character agrees with another about being smart.			
ST (episode 5) (00:21:44) You're goddamn right I am.	**Comsub. 1** أنت محق تمامًا.	**Comsub. 2** أنت محق تمامًا.	**Cybersub. 1** أنت محق تمامًا.	**Cybersub. 2** أنت محق تمامًا.
Back translation of taboo(s)	"deleted"	"deleted"	"deleted"	"deleted"

In this instance, the religious taboo word was euphemized to the extreme and was deleted completely. Both Tables 11 and 12 depict an instance of severe euphemism, indicating that for commercial subtitlers and cybersubtitlers religious taboo is the limit and it is usually either toned down or not translated completely.

Discussion

The study set out to respond to two research questions. First, how do Arabic translators handle the translation of taboos in the horror genre, considering cultural and religious sensitivities? Second, what strategies are employed to maintain the ST's intended emotional impact of taboos?

In answering the first question, the analysis shows that most taboos, whether of religious or cultural persuasion, are translated using an approach that tones down their tabooness. Euphemizing taboos is the method of choice found in the examined subtitles of the horror TV series, and this follows the subtitling norm as seen in Table 3. However, it's noteworthy to point out that in certain instances, as shown in Tables 8 and 10, the translation deviates from this standard, finally preserving certain elements of the banned term. Subtitling taboos by challenging subtitling and untimely societal norms in a certain way may entail a risk of societal condemnation of the subtitler, especially if such religious language or content goes against the viewers' beliefs.

Looking at Tables 4 and 5, they demonstrate that opting to render the ST taboo 'fuck' or its variants into an Arabic taboo related to the notion of damning, cursing, or hell is an obvious form of euphemism that alters the emotional impact of the ST's taboo. Describing something as 'fucking' is not as similar as describing it as 'damned'. There is a sexual taboo that seems to influence social and/or subtitling norms around subtitling the word 'fuck' and its variants. But for the TT taboo لعين (English: damned) there seems to be a different kind of taboo that is of less severity and therefore less emotional effect. Nonetheless, the TT taboo لعين still carries negative religious connotations and disregard for Islamic teachings, especially when it is noted that 'Arabs are mostly Muslims' (Khalil, 2013). Considering that the analyzed examples were produced by individuals who come from different educational, geographical, and professional backgrounds, their translational choices regarding religious terminology seem to be conditioned

by their different individual dispositions rather than normative expectations, which are the norms anticipated by the audience.

In general, the textual analysis illustrates that taboos represent a challenge either due to subtitling or social norms and this is evident in how cybersubtitlers and commercial subtitlers deal with taboo language that has blasphemous or immoral references which may not be favorable to an Arabic-speaking viewer. Subtitling such content in a certain way may entail a risk of societal condemnation of the subtitler, especially if such language goes against the viewers' beliefs. The analyzed examples demonstrate how translators negotiate power relations and agency and also demonstrate how translators/translations influence target societies' evolvement (Williams & Chesterman, 2002) by producing TTs that may cause societal condemnation or risk to the translators in the way taboo language is subtitled.

The textual analysis also shows that cybersubtitlers are more willing to challenge Arabic subtitling norms compared to commercial subtitlers. This is demonstrated in instances where cybersubtitle examples maintained the English tabooness in Arabic while being more closely aligned with the ST's intended message. Norms are important in the field of Arabic subtitling, as demonstrated by earlier studies (e.g., Alharthi, 2016; Khalaf & Rashid, 2016). The current textual analysis supports this finding when it comes to subtitling forbidden languages in the Arab world.

According to Toury (1995, p. 55), the concept of norms indicates "what is prescribed and forbidden as well as what is tolerated and permitted in a certain behavioral dimension". Although it might be difficult to determine overarching subtitling norms for taboos that can be applied throughout the Arab World, it can nevertheless be claimed that commercial subtitlers, when translating taboos related to swearwords and sex-related content, use an expression that is more euphemistic in the TT, while some cybersubtitlers do not necessarily adhere to this.

As for the second research question which deals with strategies employed to maintain the ST's intended emotional impact of taboos, the textual analysis reveals varying results. The previous examples of translations of taboos show that euphemism and deletion are frequently used when dealing with English religious and cultural taboos. When examining all the examples together, it is evident that in nearly every instance, avoiding translating taboos is preferred over maintaining the ST's intended emotional impact. However, some cybersubtitlers have challenged this norm of adopting euphemism and deletion by actively translating taboos, which resulted in a translation that keeps, at least to a certain degree, the ST's intended emotional impact that is necessary for a horror genre.

In the case of a TV series that belongs to the horror genre, the intended emotional impact of taboos is vital. The analysis demonstrates that a subtitling/cybersubtitling of taboos analyses the Skopos (Vermeer, 1978) or function of this delicate type of language and not just equivalence (Nida & Taber, 1969) at the word level. Having the function of the translation in mind, the textual analysis shows that the function of the translation as a horror text influences the emotional impact of the TT. As seen from the analyzed examples, when the function of the text is to insult, scare, or agitate the viewer using taboos, the TT should at least try to imitate such emotions.

As claimed by Cronin (2012), when viewers become subtitlers, they challenge previously held assumptions about translations being produced by agents to be consumed by an audience, and this also applies to forms of translation beyond AVT. Once a viewer becomes a prosumer, the notion of "target audience" changes: the translator no longer generates a target-oriented translation for an audience – the target audience instead produces their own "self-representation" (Cronin, 2012), and we believe that this is what is happening in the analyzed cybersubtitles. This is another vital aspect of Arabic cybersubtitling that warrants further investigation and ideally should include the cybersubtitlers themselves to get their input on the reasoning behind translational decisions. Self-representation is made possible by embracing a different view of agency and the empowering potential of translation as a mode of "personal expression" (Dwyer, 2012). Personal expression, self-representation, and/or agency are evident when both commercial subtitlers and cybersubtitlers defy conventionally agreed-upon norms of taboos from horror productions, as we have illustrated earlier.

In conclusion, it was found that all instances of Arabic translations of English taboos tended to tone down the examples of taboos analyzed in the current study by resorting to approaches such as euphemism or in severe cases, deletion. As mentioned earlier, English taboos are considered taboos when translated into their formal equivalent in Arabic. In other words, English taboos have optimum emotional effects in Arabic if translated in a word-for-word approach. In our textual analysis, such an approach was not used in any of the examined translations. It was found in most analyzed instances of English taboos that commercial subtitlers tend to flatten religious and cultural taboos when rendering them into Arabic, which is a finding that correlates to previous research on the Arabic rendering of English taboos.

The case for cybersubtitlers is similar but they use less severe forms of euphemism as illustrated in the analysis. This suggests that cybersubtitlers are more courageous when it comes to translating ST taboos and this is interesting because it demonstrates a form of preserving the ST's intended emotional effect of taboos. This finding establishes that some Arabic cybersubtitlers are indeed challenging negotiated public narratives by breaking subtitling norms. This practice is a form of 'social agency' (Pérez-González, 2017), a practice that could be linked to frustration with commercial subtitling's handling of taboos or with how social norms dictate how certain language elements "must" be translated (Aljammaz, 2022), which is an interesting observation to report.

Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to answer two research questions asking about how Arabic translators handle the translation of taboos in the horror genre, considering cultural and religious sensitivities. It also intended to know what strategies are employed to maintain the ST's intended emotional impact of taboos. Despite an obvious lack of research on Arabic language subtitling (Abdelaal, 2019; Alharthi, 2016; Furgani, 2016; Khalaf & Rashid, 2016), previous studies show that taboos tend to be flattened by Arabic cybersubtitlers.

The study's findings are consistent with those of other studies that claim that taboos are usually euphemized or deleted when subtitled into Arabic (e.g., Alharthi, 2016; Khalaf & Rashid, 2016). Interestingly, our findings also show instances where cybersubtitlers go against the norm and do translate and therefore preserve some of the ST's intended emotional impact,

which is a practice that has been proven about cybersubtitlers in previous studies (e.g., Aljammaz, 2023; Massidda, 2015).

This study has a few limitations, one of which is that it focuses on the English/Arabic language pair, limiting its scope. Another limitation is the lack of input from the commercial subtitlers and cybersubtitlers in question which could have contributed valuably to inquiries around the translation process and the reasoning behind adopting a translation method/approach over another.

Despite these limitations, our findings contribute to the broader knowledge of translation theory, particularly in the context of culturally specific taboos in genres like horror. They also offer insights into the challenges faced and strategies employed by translators working with culturally divergent texts. The findings of this research may have implications for the development of more effective translation strategies and approaches and ultimately develop guidelines for Arabic taboo translation. The study's methodology could be adapted to be used on larger-scale inquiries of a similar aim or on different genres such as taboos in humorous productions or expanding the idea of studying taboos within other language pairs.

Bio

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