



## Research article

# Subtitling strategies of swear words and taboo expressions in the movie “Training Day”



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## ABSTRACT

Translators face some problems when they translate swear words and taboo expressions, as they belong to different cultures and they have different impacts on the audience. Although some studies examined the problems faced in translating swear words and how to deal with them, little is known about studies that examined the strategies employed in translating such words and expressions from English into Arabic. Therefore, this study examines the strategies employed in translating such words and expressions from English into Arabic in the “Training Day” movie; and to assess the quality of subtitling these expressions. Samples from the movie were selected and analyzed. The results of the study showed that the subtitler used different strategies to subtitle swear and taboo words and expressions. Two of the most common strategies were found to be translating the swear and taboo words euphemistically, and by omission. As regards, the quality of the subtitles, they were found to be of good quality. This study concludes by proposing a model for subtitling swear words and Taboo expressions.

## 1. Introduction

There are different languages and cultures around the world, whereby communication between those different cultures and countries occur; therefore, translation has become an essential and important task in our daily life. For this purpose, different works from different cultures have always been translated. One important genre that has always been taken care of in translation is movie subtitling. This has helped bridge the gap between the different cultures. Nowadays, people watch American movies for fun and for even learning English. These movies, however, are always abundant with swear and taboo words and expressions. These words and expressions might cause a challenge for a translator. Swearing and taboo words are called a bad language. They are a common phenomenon, especially in movies. Today, new generations, young people in particular, use bad language to express their frustration, fear, nervousness, surprise, annoyance, gladness and disbelief. These words are used in several western movies; for this reason, subtitling has become an important issue (Prihartanti, 2012; Pesah, 2015; Pratama, 2017). They are an integral part of the spoken English, and they are used for different purposes. In this regard, Hughes (1988) classified the use of swear words into eight categories, based on the pragmatic and grammatical functions. These categories are:

- Personal: in which, ‘you’ plus the swearword are used, e.g. ‘you fuck’
- Personal by reference: in which a reference is used in addition to the swear word such as ‘what the fuck?’, ‘who the fuck?’
- Destination: such as fuck off
- Cursing: such as ‘fuck you’
- General expletive: indicative of annoyance or pain such as ‘Fuck!’
- Explicit expletive: indicative of annoyance or pain such as ‘Fuck it!’
- Phrasal verb: such as ‘fuck about’ or ‘fuck up’.
- Adjectival extension: such ‘fucking’, ‘shitty’

Battistella (2005) classifies swearwords into three categories: epithets’ such as ‘bitch, fag; ‘profanity’ such as ‘Goddamn and hell; and ‘obscenity/vulgarity’ such as ‘fuck and shit’. In a similar vein, McEnery and Xiao (2004) categorized the use of ‘fuck’ into nine categories. They are quoted below (see Table 1):

Actually, swear words and taboo expressions are kind of prohibited in some societies because of social and cultural factors. Many words and expressions in the movies are viewed as ‘taboo’, such as those which are used to describe sex, our bodies and their functions, and those which are used to insult other people. A swear word is the word used to express anger, deception, surprise and so on (Prihartanti, 2012). Wardhaugh (2000) defines the meaning of taboo as “the prohibition or avoidance of a

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behavior in one culture because it is perceived as harmful to its members by causing them fear, humiliation or shame, p.234”.

Some studies investigated the strategies employed in subtitling Arabic movies. [Dabbas and Haider \(2020\)](#) examined the cultural difficulties in subtitling the American animated sitcom *Family Guy* into Arabic and the strategies used in subtitling the cultural references especially taboo and swear words, and they found that there are constraints in subtitling these words. These constraints are governed by the nature of the audience. Such constraints forced the translator to opt for specific strategies such as the use of euphemistic expression and omission. In a similar vein, [Almijrab \(2020\)](#) investigated the extent the taboo words and expressions are translatable. He concluded that euphemism is the most appropriate translation strategy when dealing with taboo words, because of the Islamic background of the Arab audience. [Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah \(2019\)](#) examined the connotative equivalence of taboo words in American hip hop movies and their Arabic correspondence in the subtitle/Audiovisual Translation (AVT). They found that Arab amateur subtitlers used omission and euphemism as translation techniques, and this was induced by the cultural constraints between English and Arabic.

However, translation of swear words and taboo expressions in movies is not a simple job. It requires employing specific subtitling strategies. Thus, this study examines the strategies used to translate swear words and taboo expressions, and it also assesses the quality of the translation of these swear and taboo words and expressions in the movie entitled *Training Day* (2001), a movie directed by Antoine Fuqua ([Fuqua, 2001](#)), and written by David Ayer.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Subtitling strategies

Translators use a number of strategies to subtitle swear and taboo words. This study sheds light on subtitling strategies related to the concept of culture in the American Movie called "*Training Day*". In this regard, [Pedersen \(2011\)](#) suggested some strategies to subtitle culture-bound terms, and since taboo and swear words tend to be culture terms, this model was adopted in this study. In addition to Pedersen's strategies, the strategies proposed by [Abdelaal \(2019\)](#) were adopted. Some of these strategies are ST-oriented while others are TT-oriented. These strategies are unpacked below:

1. Retention: this strategy is similar to borrowing strategy proposed by [Vinay and Darbelnet \(1995\)](#), in which the ST item is retained in the TT or slightly adapted to the TL norms. It is the most faithful strategy to the ST as it transfers the ST term completely to the TT ([Pedersen, 2005](#)). Faithful is used here to refer to the extent the ST lexis is maintained in the TT. This strategy is mostly used in translating proper nouns. For example, translating John as جون; however, it is not always successful with all nouns. A case in point is "Austria, England ...etc.", which are rendered into different equivalents in Arabic.

2. Specification: in this case the ST item is not translated in the TL, but it is explained through either: a) addition, or b) completion. In addition, explicitation or addition is used to explicate the ST item. Explicitation occurs for the purpose of rendering some implicit meaning explicit or explicating a shortened name or acronym. This can take place in translating acronyms or names by adding first or last name to clarify the meaning ([Pedersen, 2005](#)). Addition happens when the translator adds some information that is latent to the ST for clarification purpose.
3. Direct translation: it is a direct word for word translation, which is mostly used for translating names of institutions and common names ([Pedersen, 2005](#)). There are two types of direct translation, viz., calque and shifts. Calque is a kind of exoticism that conveys intact literal translation. However, shifts imply a kind of shift in terms of grammar.

Regarding TT-oriented strategies, they are:

1. Generalization (superordinate term or paraphrase): this happens when the ST lexical item is translated into a more general term. In other words, a ST hypernym may be translated into its superordinate.
2. Substitution (cultural or situational): this is similar to 'equivalence', which is proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet. Using this strategy implies rendering a ST item into a culturally-equivalent TT item.
3. Omission: it occurs when the ST term is omitted and not translated in the TT.

Having discussed the strategies proposed by Pedersen, in the following section the strategies proposed by [Abdelaal \(2019\)](#) are discussed. Abdelaal proposed two strategies, which are TT-oriented strategies. These two strategies are elaborated on below.

1. Rendering informal language into formal language: this happens when translator changes the register of the ST in the TT. They translate informal language into formal language to either widen the platform of audience who can only understand formal language, or to avoid the use of some words in the TL, which cannot be used in a family context. Families usually watch movies together, where it is socially and religiously unacceptable to watch or see taboo words, be sex-related words, or any other similar swear and taboo words. Although the target audience can be young people who go cinemas, it is more common these days that people watch movies at home on YouTube or on TV.
2. Rendering the ST items euphemistically: this strategy is used when translating from English to Arabic because of the nature of the Arabic society which is constrained by religious and social factors that make it impossible to translate some ST words into Arabic. It is impossible from religious and social perspectives rather than translation perspectives. Translators usually observe the norms of the TT cultures and the social and religious aspect when they translate from any SL to a TL.

**Table 1.** Categorization of the word 'fuck' ([McEnery and Xiao, 2004](#), p. 257).

Code	Description	Examples
G	General expletive	(Oh) fuck!
P	Personal insult referring to defined entity	You fuck!/that fuck
C	Cursing expletive	Fuck you!/me!/him!/it!
D	Destinational usage	Fuck off!/he fucked off
L	Literal usage denoting taboo referent	He fucked her
E	Emphatic intensifier	Fucking marvellous!/in the fucking car
O	Pronominal' form	Like fuck/fat as fuck
I	Idiomatic 'set phrase'	Fuck all/give a fuck/thank fuck
X	Metalinguistic or unclassifiable due to insufficient context	The use of the word "fuck"/you never fucking

**Table 2.** Types of errors.

Type of error	Score assigned	Description
Serious	1	affect the subtitles and the subtitles to come and takes time for viewers to rid of them
Standard	0.5	ruin the subtitles for most viewers
Minor	0.25	go unseen unless the audiences are very observant

## 2.2. Quality assessment

This study is based on Pedersen's (2017) FAR quality assessment model, whereby 'F' stands for Functional equivalence', 'A' stands for Acceptability, and 'R' stands for 'readability'. Functional equivalence is concerned with if the subtitles convey the speaker's intended meaning; Acceptability is concerned with if the subtitles sound correct and natural in the target language; and Readability is concerned with if the subtitles can be read fluently and non-intrusively. Following the FAR Model, these three parameters are employed to test a quality of subtitles; these parameters are judged based on an error analysis typology. Errors are categorized into 'minor', 'standard' or 'serious' errors, whereby each type of error is assigned a score. Minor errors are those errors that can go unseen unless the audiences are very observant, and they are assigned a score of 0.25. Standard errors are errors that can ruin the subtitles for most viewers, and they are assigned a score of 0.5. Serious errors are errors that affect the subtitles and the subtitles to come and take time for viewers to get rid of them, and they are assigned a score of 1. These penalty scores, however, are not used throughout the model as explained in the sections to come. The table below makes it clearer (see Table 2).

In the next lines, the FAR Model components are unpacked.

### Functional equivalence

Many scholars and researchers (e.g. Gottlieb, 2001; Pedersen, 2005, 2017) argue that functional equivalence is the most important type of equivalence in subtitling because of the time and space constraints that make other types of equivalence unimportant. Pedersen (2017) follows that it is important to convey the intended meaning without the need to render the lexical items verbatim. He adds that if the meaning is not conveyed in the subtitles while the utterances of the speaker were conveyed, this should be considered an error. Pedersen divides semantic equivalence errors in his model into two types: semantic errors and stylistic errors. The two types are explained below.

### Semantic errors

According to Pedersen (2017), the penalty score for semantic equivalence are minor: 0.5, standard: 1, and serious: 2. Minor errors refer to the lexical errors that do not affect the plot of the movie or the primary meaning. Standard errors, however, happen when the subtitles show errors but still they do not affect the conveyance of the primary meaning and they do not disrupt viewers' progress with the subsequent subtitles. They happen when some utterances that are integral to the plot are left without subtitling. As regards, serious errors, they are so erroneous to the extent that they affect the viewers' understanding of the movie and affect the understanding of the subsequent subtitles.

### Stylistic errors

Pedersen (2017) follows that stylistic errors do not obstruct the understanding of a movie, and therefore they are less serious than semantic errors.

### Acceptability

The second parameter of the FAR Model is acceptability, and it centers around the extent a subtitle sounds natural and idiomatic. Acceptability errors are subdivided into three categories: **grammar** errors, **spelling** errors and errors of **idiomaticity**. Grammar errors can be assessed on the basis of minor, standard and serious errors. Minor errors are errors that can be noticed by grammarians only, e.g.,

using of who instead of whom. Serious errors impede reading and comprehension. Whereas, standard errors are those errors that neither hamper understanding nor go unnoticed by common people such as dropping the final tense marker in the third person singular in present simple tense. Spelling errors are also subdivided into serious, standard and minor errors. If it is just a spelling error, it will be rated as a minor error. However, if the error changes the meaning of a word, it will be assessed as a standard error. Serious errors make it difficult to read a word. Pedersen follows the NER<sup>1</sup> Model in grading acceptability, which means that serious errors are penalized by 1, while Standard errors are penalized by 0.5. Minor errors are penalized by 0.25 in total, serious errors are those errors that yield false or misleading information, whereas standard errors are errors that impede comprehension or disrupt the coherent flow of text. Minor errors include errors of capitalization, apostrophes and insertion of small word (Romero-Fresco and Pöschhacker, 2017).

### Readability

The third parameter of the FAR Model is readability. Readability errors are subdivided into errors of segmentation and spotting, punctuation and reading speed and line length. The following graph summarizes the FAR Model (adopted from Abdelaal, 2019).

## 3. Methodology

The main objectives of our study are to identify the strategies that are used to translate swear word and taboo expressions as well as assess the quality of the translation. Therefore, this study adopts mixed method approach, whereby qualitative analysis was used to identify the strategies used in the translation while quantitative measurements were used to assess the quality of the subtitles. In this regard, Strauss and Corbin (1990) define qualitative research as that research, which produces findings that are not reached through statistical procedures or other methods of quantification. However, quantitative research is more about statistical inferences and numbers. Numbers were used to assess the translation quality only, and there were no specific statistical tests used. Numbers were given to assess the subtitles based on the researchers' background knowledge. The researchers are bilinguals who master English and Arabic; and therefore, can judge the translation quality. For more methodological details, please refer to the theoretical framework section.

In relation to sampling, this study adopts purposive sampling. The researcher chose the American movie "Training Day" and found 40 examples of using swear words or taboo words. These samples cover most but not all the swear and taboo words used in the movie. The data was manually collected from the American movie entitled "Training Day". This is considered as a case study. The Movie is an American crime and drama film released in 2001, directed by Antoine Fouquet, written by David Eyre, and starring Denzel Washington and Ethan Hawk. **We have selected this movie because it is a good source for many swear and taboo words and expressions, which is one of the criteria of selecting samples in qualitative inquiry (Patton, 1990). Another reason for choosing this film is its popularity in the Arab world.** The film was thoroughly analyzed using Pedersen's (2005) subtitling strategy typology and Pedersen's (2017) quality assessment model.

The movie was accessed on YouTube and the English and the Arabic subtitles were downloaded from <https://yifysubtitles.org/movie-imdb/tt0139654>. The English and Arabic subtitles were downloaded from the website without any modifications. The translation seems to be done by an amateur who uses unreal name. The film's events revolve around Jake Hewitt (played by Ethan Hawkie), the security officer who finally gets a

<sup>1</sup> It is a quality assessment model for intralingual (live) subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing (cf. Pedersen, 2017).

place in the anti-drug police in Los Angeles. On his first day of work, veteran investigator Alonzo Harris (played by Denzel Washington) is assigned to train him and explain the details of his daily work. Surprised by the nature of the work on the ground, Ethan never expected to work on the streets of Los Angeles filled of criminals and drug traffickers to be so different from the way he believed. The expert, Alonzo, himself, sees the secret world in crime and violates the law without any thought because it is the only way to reach truth and achieve justice. Over time, Jake finds out facts about his new colleague and trainer. Alonzo leaves Jake to die but he is spared by Mexican gangsters because one of their cousins is the girl Hawke rescued at the beginning of the movie. And, Jake comes back to the apartment of Sara (played by Eva Mendesto arrest Alonzo but a gunfight and pursuit follows.

#### 4. Results and discussion

In this section, strategies used in subtitling swear words and taboo expressions in the film have been exhaustively identified and described on the basis of the model proposed by Pedersen (2005, 2011). Then they are followed by quality assessment of the translations, based on the quality assessment model of Pedersen. It is noteworthy to mention that some examples were not included because they are redundant. Examples of retention were not given exhaustively because they are clear and any more examples will be redundant. The following graph summarizes the findings of the strategies used. However, ‘retention’ was not included because there are many examples of retention that were not presented in this study, as they seem redundant. For example, all proper nouns are examples of retention strategy.

As seen in Figure 1, omission and euphemism are the most frequent strategies (see Figure 2). These strategies are unpacked below.

1. **Retention:** This strategy is mostly used for rendering of nouns. This strategy is a borrowing strategy, whereby the ST words and expressions are transferred to the TT. In this movie, retention was used to translate the names of drugs and people. Examples of such a strategy use are provided below.

1a. 00:19:42,790-> 00:19:46,290  
P.C.P. Primos.  
PCP. Primos.

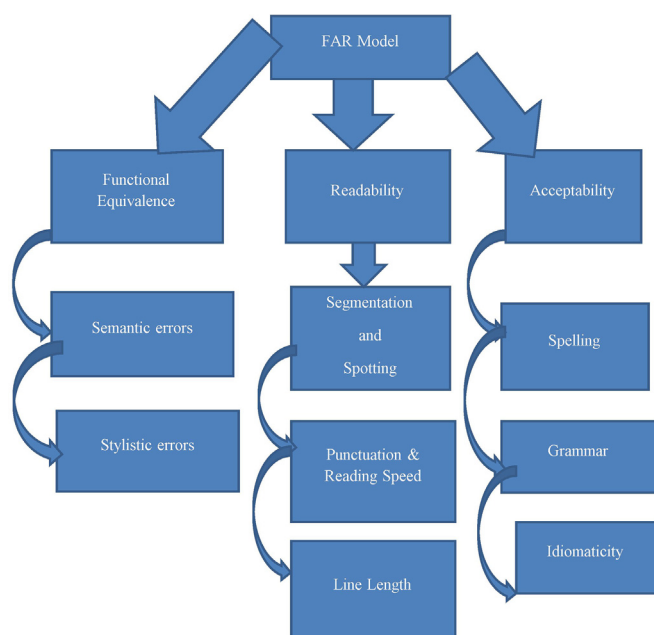


Figure 1. FAR model.

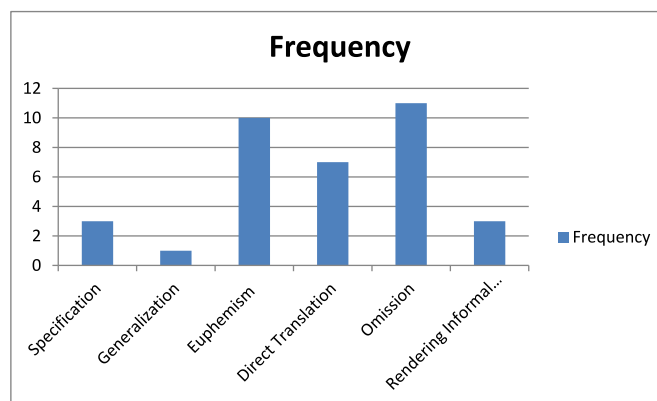


Figure 2. Frequency of subtitling strategies.

As seen in example 1a, the slang terminology for the combination of drugs, that is, P.C.P. Primos, were retained in English in the translation. In other words, it was left without translation. The abbreviation ‘P.C.P stands for phencyclidine and it causes hallucination, and to become extremely violent, and to feel high. People were known to do themselves horrible things under the influence of PCP.

As for the quality assessment, subtitles translated using retention as a strategy rarely have any semantic or stylistic errors because the ST items are left without translation.

2. **Specification:** this strategy is divided into addition and completion when the culture-bound term is left untranslated, and it is indicated by adding additional information. Examples of such a strategy use are provided below.

2a. 00:05:48,790-> 00:05:49,790

Well, there was a D.U.I. Stop...

00:05:48,265-> 00:05:51,143

حسنًا , حدث ذات مرة توقف إجباري لسائق مخمور

**Well, once a forced stop happened to a drunk driver**

As seen in the example 2a, the ST expression D.U.I, which stands for ‘driving under the influence’, was subtitled into سائق مخمور... The subtitler opted to translate it to سائق مخمور [drunk driver] instead of translating it as ‘driving under influence’. This is a kind of specification through explication. However, in this case, explication is employed using more direct and clearer, yet, fewer words. Another example of specification strategy is provided below.

2b. 00:27:49,070-> 00:27:50,570

We didn't do shit, man!

لم نفعل شيء, الفتاة هي عاهرة

**We did nothing; the girl is a prostitute**

As seen in the above example, there is an expansion in the translation, as some words, viz., الفتاة هي عاهرة do not exist in the ST. the subtitler added this information to maintain the spatial view of the readers and to keep them engaged following the events of the movie. He also translated the tailed words ‘shit, man’, as شيء, which is a generalization strategy.

2.c 00:28:22,100-> 00:28:23,100

And they're going to blast you fools!

سيقتلونكم يا ملاعين

**They will kill you cursed guys**

As seen in example 2c, the word ‘fools’ was subtitled as ملاعين (cursed), which sounds more expressive than the ST word. This might be motivated by the subtitler's desire to maintain the flow of the use of strong expressive words. However, the word could have been translated literally as اغبياء, without affecting the flow of the movie. A quality assessment of specification-related examples is summarized in the table below (see Table 3).



**Table 3.** Quality assessment for specification-related examples.

English source text	The subtitle	Subtitling strategy	Functional equivalence	Acceptability	Readability
2.a Well, there was a D.U.I. Stop	حسنًا , حدث ذات مرة توقف إجباري لسائق مخمور	Specification	0	0.25	0.25
2b. We didn't do shit, man!	لم نفعل شيء. الفتاة هي عاهرة	Specification	0.25	0.25	0.25
2c. And they're going to blast you fools!	سيقتلونكم يا ملاعين	Specification	1	0	0.25

As seen in the table above, example 2a shows a minor stylistic error, which is a functional equivalence error; and acceptability error in terms of spelling. Also, it has a minor error in readability because the subtitler used an English comma instead of Arabic comma. Example 2c has a standard error in functional equivalence as well, as the TT word ملاعين is expressively stronger than the ST word.

## 5. Generalization

This is a kind of strategy that is used by a subtitler when he decides to use a hypernym for a ST word in the target language (Abdelaal, 2019). Examples of such a strategy use are discussed below.

3a. 00:15:52,060-> 00:15:53,560

That's classic brick-Pack Mexican

إنها مجموعة مخدرات مكسيكية

They are a bunch of Mexican drugs

As seen in example 2b, the ST expression 'brick-pack' was subtitled into مجموعة مخدرات; it is named after the package brand name that it comes in when smuggled across the Mexican border. The subtitler opted to translate the ST expression into a more general term that can be mentally accessed and perceived easily. The quality assessment is provided below (see Table 4).

As seen in the table, a minor error that does not affect meaning can be identified. The TT did not identify the brand type of the Mexican drug, which is common in the case of using generalization as a subtitling strategy.

## 6. Translation using a euphemistic expression

Actually, this strategy was not stated by Pedersen (2005, 2011), but it was proposed by Abdelaal (2019). In the Arabic culture, people tend not to talk about, watch or listen to sex-related issues openly or explicitly. This cultural difference obliges the subtitler to euphemistically render some sex-related words to make them more suitable to target culture viewers, which is a kind of physiological limitation (Malenova, 2015). Examples of such a strategy use are provided below.

4a. 00:07:04,360-> 00:07:06,360

No shit. So, uh,

- ليس معقول

This is not logical

In 4a, the subtitler used a euphemistic expression to render the ST word 'shit' as ليس معقول instead of rendering it literally, or explicitly. This might have been done so as not to offend the viewers. The viewers could be family members who will feel embarrassed if the word is subtitled literally, or even using an equivalent word. Another example of the use of a euphemistic expression is provided below.

4b. 00:02:16,320-> 00:02:18,330

Yep. Ate like a pig.

نعم, لقد أكلت كثيرا

Yes, I ate a lot.

As seen in example 4b, the ST word "pig" was translated euphemistically into كثيرا (much). The ST word "Pig" is used to metaphorically describe people who eat too much. However, the Arabic word for 'pig' has negative connotations, as pigs are not of the favorite animals for Muslims and it is not allowed to eat their meat. This prompted the translator to subtitle it into كثيرا. Further, the ST expression is idiomatic in

English and if translated literally, it may not be perceived by the Arab audience.

4c. 00:17:40,170-> 00:17:42,670

Shut the fuck up, and just wait.

- إخرس و انتظر !

Shut up and wait

In 4c, the ST verb 'fuck' is a taboo verb and it is rude to use in English as well. However, native English speakers make frequent use of the verb 'fuck', which is not acceptable, though used, in Arabic. Although the subtitler translated the word into an impolite and rude word, that is, إخرس, it is a euphemistic translation of the ST word 'fuck', which sounds strikingly rude.

4d.Yeah, keep walking, bitch!

استمر في المغادرة يا كلبة

Keep moving out you a bitch

As seen in the example above, the ST word "bitch" was translated into كلبة. Although, the subtitler rendered the word literally, this does not sound as rude as the ST. The ST word is always used as a swear word to describe a woman who behaves unpleasantly. However, the translator maintained the denotative meaning and omitted the reflected meaning of the word. In Arabic, the word 'pitch' can be used for both men and women. There is a wide range of such words in spoken Arabic depending on the geographical dialect and local culture and not only one word

4e. 00:37:12,000-> 00:37:12,960

Go on, fetch, dog.

إذهب إليه و كن متوحشا, يا ولد

Go to him and be aggressive, boy

As seen in the above example, the ST word "dog" was subtitled to ولد (boy). The subtitler opted to translate the ST word into a different word that can partially convey the message of the ST without wounding the feelings of the audience. To convey the intended meaning of the ST word 'dog', which might in this context implies violence, the translator added a phrase that does not exist in the ST explicitly, that is, و كن متوحشا (be savage/aggressive). This, however, seems to be helpful to maintain the flow of actions in the movie.

4f. 00:37:04,450-> 00:37:06,960

Fuck you, rookie!

اللعة عليك, يا أحمق !

Damn you fool

In the above example, the ST word "fuck" was rendered as اللعة عليك (damn you), which is less offensive than the ST expression. Again, this was done to observe the feelings of the Arab audience who do not use these words in a family context.

4g. 00:37:04,450-> 00:37:06,960

Fucking on their felling

اللعة على مشاعرهم

Damn their feelings

In the example above, the word 'fucking' was rendered euphemistically as اللعة. This might be throughout the movie.

4h. I'm the zigzag man. Who the fuck are you?

أنا رجل الزج زج. من أنت, بحق الجحيم؟

I am the zigzag man, who the hell are you?

In 4h, the ST word 'fuck', which is used to express anger was subtitled as بحق الجحيم, which is a euphemistic rendition of the ST word. Although the TT words are Standard Arabic, they are clearly perceived and understood by Arab speakers as showing anger.

**Table 4.** Quality assessment for generalization strategy.

English source text	The subtitle	Subtitling strategy	Functional equivalence	Acceptability	Readability
3a. That's classic brick-Pack Mexican	إنها مجموعة مخدرات مكسيكية	Generalization	0.25	0	0

4i. 00:15:27,490-> 00:15:29,490  
**Shit!**  
 تبأ  
**Hell!/Damn!**  
 4j. 00:38:38,050-> 00:38:40,090  
 Finish that **shit**. Aha  
 أكمل هذا الشيء الملعون  
**Finish this accursed thing.**  
 4k. Man, I don't sell that **shit** no more  
 أنا توقفت على بيع ذلك الشيء اللعين  
**I stopped selling this accursed thing**  
 As seen in the above examples, the ST word 'shit' was subtitled literally to the اللعين و الملعون و تبأ, which are euphemistic translations of the ST word.

4l. Civil rights violating **motherfuckers!**  
 إحقق المواطنين إنتهكتوها يا ملاعين  
 You violated the citizen rights accursed guys.  
 4m. 00:45:32,130-> 00:45:33,130  
 You pay the rent, **motherfucker**.  
 كأنك أنت الذى تدفع الإيجار يا لعين  
**As if it were you who would pay the rent, accursed guy**  
 As seen in the examples above, the ST word 'motherfucker' was translated euphemistically into ملاعين. Although the ST word has an equivalent swear expression in Arabic, the subtitler opted to render it euphemistically.  
 4n. 00:15:12,480-> 00:15:13,480  
 Run a train on your girlfriend  
 و ساجعل أولاد المنطقة يستخدمون صديقك  
**I will let the guys of the neighborhood use your girlfriend**  
 As seen in 4n, the ST idiomatic expression "run a train on" was subtitled euphemistically into يستخدمون (use) rather than يعاشرون.

4o. 00:33:00,710-> 00:33:02,710  
 Let the **garbage** men handle the garbage.  
 دع الرجال السيئون يتعاملون مع من مثلهم  
 Let bad men deal with those who are equally bad  
 As seen in the example above, the ST word 'garbage' was subtitled euphemistically into السيئون (bad) instead of النفايات. In Arabic, the ST word has equivalent, which sounds rude and abrupt.

4p. 00:43:19,870-> 00:43:21,370  
 Get your big ass down!  
 إنبطحى أرضا  
 Lie down.  
 In 4p, the subtitler rendered the ST rude expression into a neutral euphemistic expression in Arabic. The ST expression has an equivalent in Arabic, but it sounds rude to use.

All the examples above illustrate how a subtitler can choose to euphemistically translate the term, or by omitting the ST word and compensating for it in the TT. The table below summarizes the quality assessment for the euphemistic strategy-related expressions and words (see Table 5).

As we see in above table, Example (3 a, b, c) showed standard errors because the meaning of subtitling is lost. . And, in all the other examples minor readability errors in punctuation and omitted full stops.

## 7. Direct translation

In direct translation, translators render ST lexical items literally. In relation to the current study, some expressions were found to be translated literally in the movie. Examples of such strategy uses are provided below.

5a. 00:16:15,080-> 00:16:17,080  
**hell if I am.**

**Table 5.** The quality assessment for the euphemistic strategy-related expressions and words.

English source text	The subtitle	Subtitling strategy	Functional equivalence	Acceptability	Readability
4a. No shit. So, uh,	ليس معقول	Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression	1	0.5	0.25
4b. Yep. Ate like a pig.	نعم. لقد أكلت كثيرا	Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression	1	0	0.25
4c. Shut the fuck up, and just wait.	إخرس و انتظر!	Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression	1	0	0.25
4d. Yeah, keep walking, bitch!	استمر فى المغادرة يا كلب	Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression	0	0.25	0.25
4e. Go on, fetch, dog.	إذهب إليه و كن متوحشا. يا ولد	Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression	0.5	0	0.25
4f. Fuck you, rookie!	! اللعة عليك. يا أحقق	Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression	0	0	0.25
4g. <b>Fucking</b> on their felling	اللعة على مشاعرهم	Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression	0	0	0
4h. I'm the zigzag man. Who the fuck are you?	أنا رجل الزج زج. من أنت. بحق الجحيم؟	Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression	0	0	0
4i. Let the garbage men handle the garbage.	دع الرجال السيئون يتعاملون مع من مثلهم	Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression	0	0	0
5j. Civil rights violating motherfuckers!	! حقوق المواطنين إنتهكتوها يا ملاعين	Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression	0	0	0
4k. Man, I don't sell that <b>shit</b> no more	أنا توقفت على بيع ذلك الشيء اللعين	Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression	0	0	0
4l. Civil rights violating <b>motherfuckers!</b>	حقوق المواطنين إنتهكتوها يا ملاعين!	Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression	.25	0	0
4m You pay the rent, <b>motherfucker</b> .	كأنك أنت الذى تدفع الإيجار يا لعين	Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression	0	0	0
4n. Run a train on your girlfriend	و ساجعل أولاد المنطقة يستخدمون صديقك	Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression	1	0	0
4o. Let the <b>garbage</b> men handle the garbage.	دع الرجال السيئون يتعاملون مع من مثلهم	Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression	0	0	0
4p. Get your big ass down!	إنبطحى أرضا	Translation Using a Euphemistic Expression	0	0	0

## الجحيم من نصيبى

Hell is for me

In example 5a, the subtitler translated the idiom literally. The subtitler chose to translate the ST expression kind of literally.

5b. you **fucking pig**! Come on!

أيها الخنزير الملعون!

You a cursed pig

In the example above, the ST word 'pig', which refers to the speaker's friend, was translated directly and literally as الخنزير. This is different from previous translations of the same word. This sounds normal as there is always more than one way to translate lexical items.

5c. 00:04:46,203-&gt; 00:04:48,789

Please, **shut up**.

أرجوك إخرس

Please shut up

As seen in 5c, the ST phrasal verb 'shut up' was subtitled literally to إخرس. This is a literal direct translation, as the ST and the TT words sound functionally and lexically equivalent.

5d. **Damn** right I trust him.

00:13:08,872-&gt; 00:13:11,166

- اللعنه, بالطبع أثق به

Damn it! Of course I trust him

5e. 00:25:14,410-&gt; 00:25:15,910

Saving the god **damn** world!

تريدون حماية ذلك العالم الملعون

**You want to protect this accursed world**

5f. 00:46:05,160-&gt; 00:46:08,160

I want to see that god **damn** warrant.

أريد أن أرى ذلك الإذن الملعون

I want to see that damned warrant

In the examples above, the ST word 'damn' was subtitled literally to اللعنه. They are near equivalents to the ST word.

5g. 00:20:54,150-&gt; 00:20:56,150

This is **my dog's** house.

هذا منزل كلبى

**This is my dog's house**

In the example above, the ST word 'dog' was subtitled into كلبى. The ST word is used as a swear word, as the speaker was not referring to a real dog. Rather, he was referring to his friend naming him as a dog. The TT word كلب is deemed equivalent to the ST word denotatively and metaphorically.

5h. 00:21:24,180-&gt; 00:21:27,680

Yeah, time to get my **swerve** on her

حان وقت الانحراف

**It is time to diverge**

The ST word 'swerve' in this context refers to the desire of having fun with a lady in one's own way. The translator opted to translate it to a near equivalent word, that is, الانحراف. The quality assessment of the Directly translated words/terms is summarized in this table (see Table 6).

As seen in the table above, functional equivalence does not seem to be a problem. Also, most examples have minor acceptability errors in spelling and readability errors in punctuation.

## 8. Omission

Omission is one of the strategies used to subtitle some taboo and swear expressions. In the movie, the subtitler opted to delete some ST words/phrases and he sometimes compensate for them. Examples of such a strategy use are provided below.

6a. 00:11:41,770-&gt; 00:11:42,770

The **shit** is coming out of your eyes.

إنه ظاهر جداً فى عينيك

It is quite clear in your eyes

In 6a, the subtitler omitted the ST word 'shit', which in this context refers to eyes' secretion, maybe due to his inability to find equivalent standard word in the TL. Or maybe because the equivalent in the TL sounds socially and culturally inappropriate to be seen on a TV or cinema screen.

6b. 00:10:33,240-&gt; 00:10:34,200

**Shit**, man. You going to teach me that old school,

0:10:33,133-&gt; 00:10:37,429

هل ستعلمنى تلك الأشياء القديمة،

Will you teach me those old stuff?

6c. 00:07:04,360-&gt; 00:07:06,360

No **shit**. So, uh, she calls our supervisor

هى إتصلت بمشرفها

She called her supervisor

As seen in the examples above, the ST word 'shit' was omitted in the Arabic subtitles because it is a taboo. This omission, however, doesn't seem to impact the intended meaning.

6d. 00:09:34,640-&gt; 00:09:35,640

Get the **fuck** out of my car,

تخرج من سيارتى

Get out of my car

6e. 00:26:53,010-&gt; 00:26:55,010

I saw something. Stop the **fuck** car!

أوقف السيارة! لقد لمحت شيئاً ما!

Stop the car. I saw something

6f. 00:28:18,090-&gt; 00:28:20,100

You, too, **fuck** white boy!

- أنت أيضاً، أيها الأبيض!

You too, the white

6g. 00:44:50,460-&gt; 00:44:51,960

Where the **fuck** is your back-Up?

أين رجال الشرطة الاحتياطيين؟

Where are the backup policemen?

As seen in above examples, the ST word 'fuck' was omitted in all the examples. Actually, this word is a strong taboo word that might be said by some people but is not appropriate for formal or semi-formal context.

6h. 00:21:52,210-&gt; 00:21:54,210

Back to the world, **dog**.

- فى صحة العودة إلى العالم

In the health of the return of the world

6i. 00:39:02,070-&gt; 00:39:05,120

I haven't got nothing on me. I gave it up, **dog**.

ليس معى شيء

Table 6. The quality assessment of the directly translated words/terms.

English ST	The subtitle	Subtitling strategy	Functional equivalence	Acceptability	Readability
5a.hell if I am.	الجحيم من نصيبى	Direct translation	0	0	0.25
5b.you fucking pig! Come on!	أيها الخنزير الملعون!	Direct translation	0	0	0
5c.Shit!	تبا	Direct translation	0	0	0.25
5d.Damn right I trust him.	- اللعنه, بالطبع أثق به	Direct translation	0	0	0
5e.Saving the god damn world!	أكمل هذا الشيء الملعون	Direct translation	0	0	0
5f.This is my dog's house.	هذا منزل كلبى	Direct translation	0	0.25	0
5g.Please, shut up.	أرجوك إخرس	Direct translation	0	0	0.25
5hj.Yeah, time to get my swerve on her	حان وقت الانحراف	Direct translation	0	0	0

**Table 7.** Quality assessment for omission strategy translated words.

English ST	The subtitle	Subtitling strategy	Functional equivalence	Acceptability	Readability
6a. The <b>shit</b> is coming out of your eyes.	إنه ظاهر جداً في عينيك	Omission	0	.250	0
6b. <b>Shit</b> , man. You going to teach me that old school	هل ستعلمني تلك الأشياء القديمة	Omission	0.25	0.25	0
6c. No <b>shit</b> . So, uh, she calls our supervisor	هي إتصلت بمشرفها	Omission	0	0.25	0.25
6d. 5d. Get the <b>fuck</b> out of my car,	تخرج من سيارتي	Omission	0	0.25	0
6e. I saw something. Stop the <b>fucking</b> car!	! أوقف السيارة ! لقد لمحت شيئاً ما	Omission	0	0	0
6f. You, too, <b>fucking</b> white boy!	! أنت أيضاً. أيتها الأبيض	Omission	0	0	0.25
6g. Back to the world, <b>dog</b> .	في صحة العودة إلى العالم	Omission	0	0.25	0.25
6h. Didn't find a <b>damn</b> thing.	، لم أجد أي شيء	Omission	0	0.25	0.25
6i. My <b>fucking</b> money back, <b>motherfucker</b> .	! أعيدوا إلى مالي	Omission	0	0.25	0.25
6j. 00:45:55,150-> 00:46:00,160 Didn't find a <b>damn</b> thing.	، لم أجد أي شيء	Omission	0	0	0
6k. 00:46:26,680-> 00:46:27,180 My <b>fucking</b> money back, <b>motherfucker</b> .	! أعيدوا إلى مالي	Omission	0	0	0

**Table 8.** Quality assessment for subtitles where formal language was used to render informal language.

English ST	The subtitle	Subtitling strategy	Functional equivalence	Acceptability	Readability
7a. 00:04:43,220-> 00:04:46,220 No. Hell, no, you won't. You fucked that up.	اللجنة، لن تفعل لقد أفسدت عليك الدعوة	Rendering Informal language formal	0	0	0
7b. It's 90% bullshit, but it's entertaining.	هذه صحيفة الأخبار. حسناً ؟ تسعين بالمائة منها هراء	Rendering Informal language formal	0	0	0
7c. 00:07:38,400-> 00:07:39,900 You tapped that ass, didn't you?	عاشرتها، أليس كذلك ؟	Rendering Informal language formal	0	0	0

لقد تركت تلك الأشياء

I have nothing

I left all such stuff

As seen in the examples above, the ST word 'dog' was omitted in the Arabic subtitling. The Arabic word for 'Dog' is a swear word that Arab speakers, mostly those who are not educated, use when they are upset or angry. But, it does not seem appropriate word to be used on TV.

6j. 00:45:55,150-> 00:46:00,160

Didn't find a **damn** thing.

لم أجد أي شيء

I found nothing

6k. 00:46:26,680-> 00:46:27,180

My **fucking** money back, **motherfucker**.

أعيدوا إلى مالي !

Give me back my money

As seen in the examples above, the ST words 'damn' and 'motherfucker' were omitted in the Arabic subtitles. Quality assessment for directly translated words is provided in the table below (see Table 7).

As seen in the table above, example 6a showed a minor functional equivalence error in spelling. Example 5b showed a minor functional equivalence and acceptability errors, in particular semantic and spelling errors. Example 5c showed a minor acceptability error in grammar, as the ST verb is in present, while it was subtitled in the past. Example 5d showed minor acceptability and readability errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation marks.

## 9. Rendering informal language formal

This strategy was proposed by Abdelaal (2019), whereby he found that subtitlers render informal language formally. Many swear and taboo words were formally subtitled to make them accessible and comprehensible to the vast majority audience in the Arab world. Rendering informal language formal also implicates a euphemistic rendition. Arabic formal language tends to be more euphemistic than informal language. Examples of such a strategy use are discussed below.

7a. 00:04:43,220-> 00:04:46,220

No. Hell, no, you won't.

You fucked that up.

اللجنة، لن تفعل لقد أفسدت عليك الدعوة

Damn it! You will not do it. I spoiled such invitation

As seen in 7a, fuck up, which is a slang phrasal verb that means 'to ruin', was subtitled formally as أفسدت. This sound appropriate for the Arab audience who will be offended if the ST verb was translated formally.

7b. 00:05:35,270-> 00:05:39,280

It's 90% bullshit,

but it's entertaining.

هذه صحيفة الأخبار. حسناً ؟

تسعين بالمائة منها هراء

This is the newspaper, well?

Ninety percent is nonsense

In 7b, the taboo word 'bullshit' was translated formally into هراء (nonsense). It is a formal euphemistic subtitling of the ST word.

7c. 00:07:38,400-> 00:07:39,900

You tapped that ass,

didn't you?

عاشرتها، أليس كذلك ؟

You fucked her, isn't it?

In 7c, a direct translation of the expression 'tap that ass' is vulgar And unacceptable for the Arab audience... The subtitler, therefore, opted to translate as عاشرتها, which a polite word that connotes (without saying explicitly) having sex. In total, rendering the ST words euphemistically and rendering informal language formal seem to overlap when it comes to translating swear and taboo words and expressions (see Table 8).

As seen in the table above, all the subtitles were of good quality. In conclusion, this study showed that many of the strategies proposed by Abdelaal were used in subtitling the taboo and swear words and expressions. However, it was found that omission and euphemistic translation are the most common strategies used by the subtitler. These findings are similar to those findings of Dabbas and Haider (2020), Almijrab (2020), Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah (2019), who found that omission and euphemism are the most common subtitling strategies. This study also concludes that some subtitling strategies overlap. For example,



rendering informal language formal sometimes it is done for a euphemistic purpose, and other times for the purpose of using a language understandable by everyone.

## 10. Conclusion

This study aimed to identify subtitling strategies of swear and taboo words in the American movie entitled “*Training Day*”, and to provide quality assessment for these subtitles. For this purpose, the data was collected from the movie and were analyzed using Pedersen's (2005, 2011) modified typology proposed by Abdelaal (2019) of subtitling strategies and Pedersen's quality assessment model. The results of the study illustrate that all the strategies proposed by Pedersen and those proposed by Abdelaal were used in subtitling the selected words and expressions. However, it was found that omission and euphemistic translation are the most common strategies used by the subtitler. Omission was used because of cultural constraints, as the translator observed the target culture constraints that sometimes make it difficult to render some swear and taboo words into Arabic, especially those which are perceived as very pejorative and unacceptable. These terms include expressions related to sex, excretion and others. However, in some cases the translator opted to render those pejorative sex and excretion related words into English to maintain the spirit of the ST which targets young people and teenagers. Another reason for adopting the omission strategy is economical, i.e. the translator wants to save space on the screen which allows limited number of characters. One more reason for using omission as a translation strategy is that some swear and taboo words collocate in English but they do not collocate in Arabic. Omission as a strategy can be appropriate if the translator did not create a kind of vacuum on the screen that hampers the viewers from enjoying the movie. The second most common strategy is euphemistic translation, which is quite expected; the Arab society is conservative and therefore some swear and taboo words sound super offensive. To avoid such subtle offensiveness and rudeness, the translator opted to render many swear and taboo words euphemistically. I think this strategy is acceptable as long as it does not affect the essence of meaning. However, one problem with such a strategy is that it might result in mismatch between the actors' facial expressions and body gestures on one side and the subtitles. Put clearer, the body gestures and facial expressions may convey anger and rudeness which is not reflected in the subtitles.

The quality assessment showed that most subtitles are of good quality. It is suggested that Pedersen's Model of quality assessment needs to be revised. The model provides quantitative assessment, but the qualitative assessment is required as well. Previous studies on subtitling swear words and taboo expressions are still lacking. A model that regulates the strategies used in subtitling from Arabic into English is also needed.

## Declarations

### Author contribution statement

Noureldin Mohamed Abdelaal: Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Amani Al Sarhani: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments.

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Data included in article/supplementary material/referenced in article.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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