



ARTICLE

 Check for updates

<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03327-4>

OPEN

Netflix English subtitling of idioms in Egyptian movies: challenges and strategies

Ahmad S. Haider^{1,2}  & Reem Shuhaimer¹

Recently, subtitles in different languages have become more available and accessible, thanks to streaming platforms like Netflix, which provide viewers with multiple language choices, including Arabic and English. This study examines the strategies of subtitling Egyptian phraseological units, particularly idioms, into English. The parallel corpus of data under examination consists of two Egyptian movies, namely, "فول الصين العظيم" *The Great Chinese Beans* and "الإنس والنمس" *The Humans and the Mongoose*. Following Baker's taxonomy of translation strategies, the analysis showed that the examined idioms were predominantly translated through cultural substitution. The analysis also showed that there were instances of erroneous literal translation. Furthermore, several cases of mistranslation were identified, which could be attributed to a potential lack of understanding of the nuances and subtleties of the source and target cultures, as well as limitations and difficulties in finding appropriate equivalents. This study may hold significance for translation practitioners and scholars, specifically those focusing on subtitling, cultural translation, and the translation of idiomatic expressions.

¹ Applied Science Private University, Amman 11931, Jordan. ² Middle East University, MEU Research Unit, Amman 11831, Jordan.  email: a_haidar@asu.edu.jo

Introduction

The development of novel branches of translation is an affirmation of the field's growth, advancement, and success. Among these ever-expanding branches is audiovisual translation (AVT). AVT, as defined by González (2009) is a branch of translation that handles the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural transfer of multimedia and multimodal texts.

The growth of this field corresponded with that of the film industry (Perego & Pacinotti, 2020), which has flourished especially in English-speaking countries and to different extents globally. This has led to a unique form and significant degree of cultural exchange that was only possible through AVT (Alabbasi, 2009).

This phenomenon was expanded by the popularization of online platforms as they have a global reach. To optimize this reach, streaming platforms provide various audio and subtitled options to make their content accessible to a larger audience (Díaz-Cintas & Massidda, 2019). This means that audiences may watch and enjoy media even if they do not understand the language in which it was created. For instance, English speakers may watch movies produced in Arabic and comprehend the speech through the provided subtitles (Haider et al., 2023; Samha et al., 2023). However, subtitled may be complicated if the language at hand is challenging or bound to a culture (Williams, 1990).

Languages may be seen as a microcosm of culture as its containers and carriers. Each language and its culture intertwine in distinctive ways that are incongruent with other languages and cultures. This makes the translation of some items challenging, which may result in a loss of meaning. Thus, translators resort to various strategies to convey the sense of the source text with the least loss (Farghal, 2020). Most phraseological units, like idiomatic expressions, contain connotative and implicit meanings that are understood through their cultural meaning instead of their denotative meaning (Xalilova & Atoyeva, 2023). Therefore, their rendition requires that the translator has a grasp of the source culture as well as the target cultures (Farghal & Haider, 2023).

While several studies have focused on the Arabic subtitled of English media (Abu-Rayyash et al., 2023; Al-Yasin & Rabab'ah, 2019; Al-Zgoul & Al-Salman, 2022; Debbas & Haider, 2020), few have examined how Arabic media is subtitled into English (Haider et al., 2023; Samha et al., 2023). Egypt has a thriving cinematic culture that is popular not only in the country but also in the surrounding region. English subtitles can allow non-Arabic speakers to appreciate these works as well. Nonetheless, Egyptian speech, in reality, and in their cinematic works, is filled with phraseological units, such as idiomatic expressions, which necessitate additional attention in translation. Hence, this paper examines two movies that contain such expressions and analyses the challenges posed to subtitled by idiomatic expressions and the strategies used in their rendition.

The study at hand attempts to answer the following two questions:

- What are the challenges that face subtitled when rendering Egyptian idioms into English in 'Great Beans of China' and 'The Humans and the Mongoose' Movies?
- Which strategies are employed in the English subtitled of Egyptian idiomatic expressions in the two investigated movies?

Literature review

This section relates the current study to previous research including both a theoretical and empirical background. Translation has achieved a status of relevance, which Bassnett (2013)

relates to the rise of the availability and the use of electronics. Furthermore, she describes translation as a human condition that increases cross-cultural communication. A branch of translation that is closely related to the advancement of technology is audiovisual translation (Díaz-Cintas, 2005), which may also be called multimedia translation. Moreover, Pérez-González (2014) found that this is the fastest-growing area of translation studies as well. Chiaro (2012, p. 30) defined AVT as the rendition of the source language verbal contents of audiovisual media in the target language. Furthermore, audiovisual translation contains various modes of subtitled and revoicing, such as inter and intralingual subtitled, dubbing, voiceover, and audio description.

Subtitling. Subtitling is among the many branches of AVT, and it is among the most prominent. Subtitling, which is the focus of this paper, involves providing written captions often transposed low on the screen, that reflect the dialogue and other aural codes. Thus, the subtitled work from the spoken and aural codes into a written form, changing the mode in which the information is presented. According to De Linde and Kay (2016), subtitles may be intralingual, where the written code and spoken code are of the same language, or interlingual, where the written code is in a different language than the spoken code. Subtitles may also be categorized into open or closed captions based on the viewer's capability of turning the captions on and off.

Díaz-Cintas (2005) found that subtitled contains many advantages as it is both time and cost-effective and may be applied to many forms of audiovisual media. However, subtitled is governed by two main technical factors, which are spatial and temporal constraints and must also abide by synchrony with the source product. Therefore, subtitled, or on-screen translation, typically does not exceed two lines at the bottom of the screen. These properties influence the subtitled's renditions, choices, and the translation strategies they employ.

On this basis, Diaz-Cintas and Remael (2014) asserted that subtitled requires that three skills be performed: spotting, rendering, and adaptation. Furthermore, they highlighted some strategies such as translation and calque, which follow ST forms, compensation, explicitation, and substitution that cover cultural and linguistic gaps, lexical recreation where new terms are invented, transposition which linguistically modifies the text, and omission and addition which modify the amount of information in the text. All of these strategies are useful for subtitled.

Challenges of translating idiomatic expressions. As discussed above, the mode of translation influences the process and product of translation. While this influence is significant, there are other players that may affect translation. This includes not only the content of the source text but its form as well. For instance, translating idiomatic expressions poses linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic challenges. As Shanti Manipuspika and Reska Julia Winzami (2021) stated that idiomatic translation entails much more than just switching out lexical and grammatical components between the two languages; it can even involve eliminating some of the text's fundamental linguistic components. Linguistically, idiomatic expressions often contain elements that cannot be translated due to lexical differences. Likewise, Li et al. (2024) asserted that the translation of idioms becomes challenging due to their non-literariness, which requires that they are contextually analyzed to interpret their true sense. Otherwise, mistranslation becomes a significant probability. Culturally, Ajaj and Mohammed (2014) argued that human languages have deeply ingrained cultural idiomaticity, which varies from language to language. Furthermore, idiomatic expressions are deeply embedded in the

source culture's context, requiring the subtitlers to find equivalent expressions in the target culture. Moreover, pragmatically, such expressions must be translated in a way that maintains the original tone and intent within the subtitles' concise format. Salman (2015) also argued for the pragmatic translation of idioms. This approach requires cultural and linguistic awareness to convey the intended meaning of the expression. This can be achieved through a number of strategies, but paraphrasing is among the most frequently employed.

Translating idiomatic expressions. Idioms and proverbs fall under the umbrella of phraseological units; therefore, their use and translation are linked with phraseology. Phraseology is a study that examines word and phrase usage in relation to context and language. Particularly, phraseology is interested in fixed and semi-fixed expressions such as idioms, proverbs, and collocations. Such expressions are characterized by the difference between their meaning and the individual meanings of their wordings. This gap makes the deduction of the sense of the whole impossible based on the sum of its parts (Mel'cuk, 1995).

Phraseology is interconnected with the disciplines of linguistics, lexicography, translation, and language and its studies (Paquot, 2015). Additionally, Fedulenkova (2019) found that phraseological units serve many pragmatic functions, including basic, normative, and occasional functions, such as cumulative, stylistic, directive, summarizing, and evaluative functions, which interact with discourse.

The study of parems, such as proverbs and idioms, is known as paremiology. This includes the study of their origins and history, and examining how they are employed and interpreted. Paremiology is described as a branch of phraseology to both linguistics and culture. Similarly, Dabbagh (2017) suggested that paremiology should be studied through cultural frameworks and cultural conceptualizations, which are cultural metaphor, schema, and category. Paremiology enhances communication abilities by identifying and explaining patterns of language use. Specifically, it relates proverbs with their cultural and historical use as well as their influence on communication and social interactions.

Idiomatic expressions and proverbs are used by all peoples as an essential part of their culture (Akbari, 2013). Furthermore, Nida (1964) stated that their meaning is interlinked with both the culture and context from which they emerged influenced and incorporated by the cultural context in which they were developed. The intrinsic relationship between such expressions and culture may complicate their transfer through translation (Ali & Al-Rushaidi, 2017). Moreover, Ordudari (2007) argued that the connotative meaning of an idiom or allusion in the source language and culture is not necessarily the same in the target language. Similarly, Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2016) found that the complexity of working with idioms from another culture begins with understanding them. Therefore, it is necessary for translators to have cultural competence in both the source and target language and possess the necessary skills to apply the necessary translation strategies adequately.

Since some cultural and linguistic nuances remove the possibility of a direct accurate translation, some elements may be paraphrased in subtitling. This requires the subtitlers to possess linguistic and cultural competence. This enables them to consider the linguistic and cultural distinctions of the source and target languages to transfer the intended sense of the source text. The subtitles must also be accurate, succinct, and viewer-friendly condensed material.

The translation of idioms has thus proven to be a complex act in general contexts. However, subtitling places further barriers on this act due to the constraining nature of this branch of

translation. Hence, Romero-Fresco (2009) found that a distinguishing feature of subtitling is condensation. This is due to the finite time and space allocated for the subtitles. In addition, there is a need to consider viewers' reading speeds, which are lessened due to their split attention between the media and the subtitles.

Hence, Baker (1992, pp. 71–78) suggested strategies that can be employed to overcome the challenging nature of idiom translation which are quoted as:

- Using an idiom of similar meaning and form to the source language.
- Using an idiom of similar meaning but a different form.
- Translation by using paraphrasing is the most common way of translating idioms.
- Translation by omission is to omit the whole idiom and not be translated into the TL text.

Similarly, Baker (1992, pp. 26–42) indicated that translation challenges must be connected to translation strategies under a systemic approach. Furthermore, Baker suggested the following strategies as a basis for translation practice and training.

- Translation by more general words (superordinate)
- Translation by more neutral/ less expressive words
- Translation by cultural substitution
- Translation by using a loan word or loan word plus an explanation
- Translation by paraphrasing using a related word
- Translation by paraphrasing using unrelated words
- Translation by omission
- Translation by illustration

This study relies on these strategies as a basis for its qualitative analysis when examining the subtitling of idioms.

Empirical studies. Translating idiomatic expressions has attracted the attention of several researchers. Various studies focused on the effects of language and culture in this field. For instance, Al-Shawi and Mahadi (2012) carried out a study investigating the problem of translating idioms from Arabic into English language and vice versa in social and religious cultures. The corpus was mostly gathered from two sources. The first source consisted of live content such as TV, radio, movies, and everyday interactions. Written materials like dictionaries, novels, magazines, and newspapers made up the second source. The study revealed that a translator's familiarity with a particular culture can often be used to identify the meaning of an idiom, especially when it has a nonliteral meaning. It was discovered that translating such idioms can be accomplished through the use of five strategies, namely, paraphrasing the idiom, using similar meanings but dissimilar forms, using notes, looking up an informant, and employing a parallel idiom in the target language.

Idioms are prominent in many genres and different forms of media. For example, Farghal and Al-Hamly (2015) examined the significance of the use of proverbs in Arabic literature from a pragmatic and semiotic value with a focus on the discourse of their translation. The results concluded that omission was the most prominent strategy, followed by literal translation and then functional translation. Likewise, Al-assaf (2019) followed Baker's strategies to examine The Arabic translation of the idioms found in Agatha Christie novel. The results indicated a high tendency for the employment of paraphrasing but also highlighted the unavailability of equivalent Arabic idioms.

In addition, Abu-Ssaydeh (2004) examined strategies used by Arab translators to translate English idioms into Arabic. The study examined a corpus of over two hundred idioms extracted from the Arabic version of Newsweek, which were placed under

six categories based on translation strategy. The idioms were categorized into six main categories according to the strategy adopted in their translation. The findings revealed that the most frequently utilized strategy is paraphrasing, followed by literal translation and semantic equivalence, with compensation and omission. It was also revealed that some English idioms have been integrated into Arabic vocabulary due to literal translation. Finally, it was found that a large number of the translations were determined to be literal, making them sound "foreign" or meaningless to the Arab reader.

In the field of AVT, Zitawi (2003) conducted a study on the Arabic dubbing of English children's cartoons examining the strategies employed in the rendition of idioms. The results showed that dynamic, literal, and naturalized translations were employed in the dubbing alongside the strategies of deletion and addition.

Furthermore, Dweik and Suleiman (2013) examined the difficulties faced by Jordanian English Majors while translating culturally bound expressions. The study's sample consisted of sixty graduate students enrolled in three Jordanian universities' M.A. programs. The study showed that the students were challenged by unfamiliarity and ambiguity, and found it difficult to provide cultural equivalents. Additionally, their unawareness of translation strategies further complicated the task.

Similarly, through a test and set of interviews Thalji and Dweik (2015) found that inexperienced Jordanian translators struggle to provide adequate renditions of idioms. Mistranslations were related to a literal approach that included linguistic and stylistic errors.

Likewise, Al Mubarak (2017) investigated challenges encountered while translating Arabic idioms into English by examining the works of Sudanese English students. The researcher employed a descriptive methodology to pinpoint and enumerate the issues students had when attempting to translate Arabic idioms into English using specific strategies. The tool that was utilized for gathering the data was a translation test. The test was comprised of twelve Arabic proverbs according to Speake's (2008) taxonomy of proverbs. The study's findings revealed that the student's ability to translate Arabic idioms into English is somewhat constricted, and it was found that the range of strategies they adopted is a reflection of the differences in their linguistic and pragmatic competence, as well as the degree of their familiarity with these idioms. It was also revealed that the students struggled to find the appropriate equivalent term in English, as seen by their inability to translate idiomatic expressions using the proper or appropriate equivalent. Finally, it was concluded that certain challenges with the translation strategy found while translating Arabic idioms to English are due to students' lack of strategy knowledge.

Research in this area also focused on the cultural aspects of idioms and their translations. Fahmi (2016) detailed sociocultural variations by comparing similar thematically categorized idioms across English and Arabic. The findings indicated a necessity for familiarity with SL and TL cultures as well as traditions and cultures.

Moreover, the translations of proverbs must be carried out systematically and not be rendered literally, keeping in mind the proverbs' cultural, religious, and historical context to maintain the essence of meaning. Likewise, Ali and Al-Rushaidi (2017) investigated the difficulties faced by sixty Omani undergraduate students studying English language teaching and literature when translating idiomatic expressions into Arabic. The findings showed that the students could not find an appropriate equivalent, misunderstood the idiom's meaning, used literal translation, and deleted the entire or some parts of the idiom without compensation.

Jibreel (2023) highlighted the complexity of translating idioms by examining machine translations of idioms in an English-Arabic language pair. The results indicated that machine translation mostly employs a literal rather than communicative approach. Thus, mistranslations may emerge from a failure to interpret the sense of the idiom or a failure to portray it through adequate phrasing.

Shhaiber and Haider (2023) examined the translation of idioms in the English Netflix subtitles of four Egyptian films. The results showed that paraphrasing was a common strategy. However, the use of literal translation was also found which resulted in shifts in meaning. Furthermore, mistranslation, which was linked to cultural incompetency, also led to meaning shifts. Additionally, there was an issue of consistency in the translations of repeated phrases.

Moreover, Destaria and Rini (2019) followed a descriptive qualitative approach in applying Baker's taxonomy to assess the effectiveness of translation strategies in the Indonesian subtitles of idiomatic expressions in the film Pitch Perfect 3. The results showed that the majority of the idioms were rendered accurately and a number of strategies were used. Paraphrasing represented the most common strategy while using a similar idiom and omission were rare.

Shanti Manipuspika and Reska Julia Winzami (2021) examined how English idioms were translated into Indonesian in the subtitles of the film Murder on the Orient Express. The results indicated that paraphrasing was the dominant strategy as it clarifies the sense of the text with consideration of cultural differences. Substitution with an idiom of similar meaning but a different form was also common for similar reasons. On the other hand, translation with an idiom of similar meaning and form and omission were less common.

Aulia Safitri et al. (2023) also examined this language pair in the Netflix series Wednesday. The study found that the subtitles employed five translation strategies, four of which were domesticating while only one was foreignizing. This highlights the relevance of culture and the challenges posed by cultural differences in the rendition of idioms.

Sutrisno et al. (2023) conducted a descriptive qualitative study to analyze the translation strategies used in translating idiomatic expressions in Beauty and the Beast movie. With the use of two subtitles, SL English and TL Bahasa Indonesia, taken from Subscene.com, the qualitative data was contrasted and examined in a descriptive way. The researcher employs expert theories from books, papers, and the internet to support the research. Each idiomatic expression and its translation were categorized by the researcher using Baker's idiomatic translation methodologies. The researchers found ten idiomatic expressions in the movie and divided them into three categories. Three idioms were translated by applying a paraphrasing strategy, three expressions were rendered by using similar meanings and forms, two expressions were rendered by using similar meanings but dissimilar forms, and finally, the omission was applied to two idiomatic expressions. Based on the analysis, it can be inferred that the most commonly employed idiomatic translation strategies for idiomatic expression in the Beauty and the Beast movie are paraphrasing and using similar meanings and forms. This data demonstrates that there are idiom-matching restrictions between Bahasa Indonesia and English and that paraphrasing can be useful when the target language lacks a comparable idiom.

This study centers on Arabic and English with a focus on Egyptian culture and its vernacular in the area of audiovisual media and its translation. This sets it apart from similar studies that examine idiom translation in different languages and translation modes. Therefore, this paper fills the research gap left in this area.

Table 1 Movies' genre, year of production, duration, and revenues.

No.	The name of the movie	Genre	Year of Production	Duration	Revenues
1	The Great Chinese Beans (فول الصين العظيم)	Comedy	2004	One hour 39 m	11,000,000 EGP
2	The Humans and The Mongoose (الإنس والنمس)	Comedy/horror	2021	Two hours	53,000,000 EGP

Methods and procedures

The English subtitling of the idiomatic expressions that are used in the Egyptian Movies “*Foul al-chibn al-uzaibim*” *The Great Chinese Beans*, and “*al-inas wan-nams*” *The Humans and The Mongoose*” are analyzed and assessed in this paper qualitatively. The first step was manually transcribing these expressions as they occurred in the Egyptian vernacular in the movies. This represented the source text. The English subtitles for these lines were extracted from www.Netflix.com to represent the target text. Since Netflix is a leading global streaming platform that aims to provide quality subtitles, a level of adequacy is expected. The platform's guidelines for subtitling will be further discussed below. The source and target text were then aligned then checked by three MA candidates in Audiovisual Translation. These MA candidates possess both an educational background and practical experience in the field, which inform their analysis. After the parallel corpus was compiled, the translations were manually analyzed according to Baker's taxonomy to identify prevailing patterns. Incidents of interest received additional attention and were highlighted in this paper.

The selected movies. Different factors were considered to decide which types of movies to select. These include the movie's genre and revenues. The genre of the first movie, “*The Great Chinese Beans*,” is comedy, and the genre of the second movie, “*The Humans and The Mongoose*,” is comedy and horror. The gross earnings and revenues for the investigated movies were high, indicating popularity and wide audience reception. Table 1 includes some information about the movies: genre, year of production, duration, and revenues.

The Great Chinese Beans is a comedy movie that attained popular success. *The Humans and The Mongoose* is considered one of the most popular Egyptian movies of 2021; it achieved very high profits and viewership. The star of both movies is Mohamed Henedi, a well-known Egyptian comedian and actor who is well-recognized for his humorous roles, which often dominate the box office.

Data collection and corpus compilation. The data comprised the English subtitles of the idiomatic expressions found in two Egyptian films in comparison to their source texts. A corpus was compiled by downloading the English subtitles and aligning them with the manually transcribed source text. Table 2 clarifies this procedure through a set of examples.

Study procedures. The procedures and steps that are followed in this study are as follows. The first step taken in this study was the selection of the films. After this, the dialogues in the Egyptian movies were manually transcribed. This transcription was then aligned with the English subtitles which were extracted from Netflix. Finally, the idiomatic expressions were analyzed and compared in order to examine the challenges they posed and which strategies were employed to overcome them. The effectiveness of said strategies was also assessed.

Results and findings

The use of idiomatic expressions is found in abundance in English vernacular. Linguistic and geographical neighbors of Egypt have become accustomed to this usage as well. These idioms stem from the language, culture, and religion of the location and are used for a variety of reasons to express many notions and emotions. These communicative properties call for adequate translation, which is why they are examined in this paper.

Tables 3–10 show examples of the translation strategies used in rendering thirty-one idiomatic expressions mentioned in the investigated movies. “Cultural substitution”, “paraphrasing using unrelated word” and “literal translation” are the three most common translation strategies that are used in translating idiomatic expressions.

Translation by cultural substitution. Starting with the idioms that are translated by using cultural substitution, which means substituting certain cultural terms from the source language for equivalent ones in the target language to fit the target culture better (Table 3).

In example 1, when a character is full of contempt for another, he wishes death upon her. The exact phrasing used was “May Allah (God) take her.” According to Farghal (1993), the religious and cultural backgrounds of Arabs lead them to view people as the object of death, while Western views place people as the subject. Furthermore, while invoking God in conversation is a regular habit for Arabs, only a small section of English speakers, typically Christian, refer to God in their everyday speech aside from some interjections like “oh my god”. Thus, a literal translation would result in an unnatural line in the target language. Resorting to a functional approach could result in the line “I hope she dies.” This rendition conveys the sense of the utterance but removes the features of its form. Replacing the source text with a target language idiom retains its sense and some of its aesthetics. Hence, the subtitle employed the target language idiom “kick the bucket,” retaining sense and aesthetics despite the inevitable cultural loss that is intrinsic to naturalization.

Examples 2 and 3 are also examples of how religion is regularly mentioned in the daily speech of Arabs. Example 2 contains the phrase “peace be upon you,” which is the Muslim greeting. This greeting is even used by non-Arabic-speaking Muslims in its Arabic form. Although it is religious in nature and origin, it is used as a casual greeting. However, in a Western context, it would seem unnatural and out of place in a random conversation. Thus, to reduce the foreignness of the phrase, the less alienating everyday “hello” was subtitled in its place.

Example 3 is perhaps the phrase that emphasizes the religion of the people in the conversation the most. To calm down others, Arabs often request that they “pray on the Prophet.” This reminds the people of their religious role model, which convinces them to improve their attitude. To non-Muslims, this effect is out of reach as they have no connection to the Prophet. Thus, to achieve a similar effect, a more generic request must replace it, leading to the subtitle “calm down.”

Table 2 Aligning the Arabic texts, including idioms, with their English subtitles.

Source Text (Egyptian Vernacular)	Target Text (English)
و لو أنت خسرت يا عم شهاوي بيقى في ستين داهية و خلصنا منك.	And if you lose, Shahawi, good riddance then!
آه فاكرها بس خد بالك أنا لحمي مر لا يمكن يا معلم، خيرك سابق الحب حمعيه، فاهمة يا نارمين؟ حقل حاجة حطها حلقة في ودنك	Yes, but you know that my flesh is very bitter. Oh no, sir, I can't. Love will blind him. Do you understand, Narmin? I'll tell you something. Keep this in mind.
يابا، يابا نفسي أخلص عليه، مش حيادخ في ايدي غلوة	Dad, I want to kill him so badly, he wouldn't last a second in my grip.
بكرا الصبح هنشتري الحاجات؟ من النجمة	We're going to buy the things tomorrow? At the earliest.

Table 3 Examples of translation idiomatic expressions by cultural substitution.

Strategy	No.	Source text (Arabic)	Literal translation	Target text
Translation by cultural substitution	1	إلهي ربنا يأخذها	Oh God, may God take her	May she kick the bucket
	2	السلام عليك يا محبي	Peace be upon you , Mohy	Hello, Mohy
	3	صلی عالنبي بقاو ما تكبروش الموضوع.	Pray upon the prophet now , and do not make a big deal out of it.	Take it easy, guys. Don't get fussy.
	4	ايه وجع القلب ده؟	What is this heartache?	What a pain in the ass
	5	ولو أنت خسرت يا عم شهاوي بيقى في ستين داهية و خلصنا منك.	And if you lose, Uncle Shahawi, it will be with sixty hells , and we will be rid of you.	And if you lose, Shahawi, good riddance then!
	6	نطقي يا بومة!	You spoke, you an owl!	You finally spoke, you devil!
	7	عازيك تمشي زي الغضنفر	I want you to walk as a strong lion.	I want you to walk like a hulk.

These examples indicate that religion can cause challenges for subtitlers in a similar manner to culture. This area highlights the relevance of pragmatics alongside naturalness and familiarity when conveying the sense of the ST to the target audience.

In example 4, the idiom “What is this heartache?” is used to express annoyance. This idiom is a form of exaggeration that implies that the frustration caused by the person or situation is affecting the speaker’s physical health. Here, the heartache may be seen as a result of a heart attack or stroke resulting from the annoyance. In English, however, heartache is often related to broken love and disappointment. Hence, translating the term literally would not only fail at conveying the intended sense but would provoke a new, unrelated meaning. Therefore, it was necessary for the phrase to be substituted, which led to the subtitler employing the expression “pain in the ass”. This expression properly conveys the intended sense but alters the register by including a taboo word.

Example 5 *في ستين داهية* was rendered as “good riddance.” The Arabic expression is considered one of the funny comedic terms commonly used in Egyptian movies and series, and it is considered a funny term despite the fact that it is said in a serious way in moments of quarrel and anger. Literally, it means “with sixty hells”; however, the subtitler chose to use an equivalent idiom to translate it. “Good riddance” is an idiom that means when you are happy when someone is gone. The connotative meaning was conveyed successfully, and it is better than translating it literally.

Examples 6 and 7 both contain animal symbolism. In example 6, one character calls another an owl as an insult. In Arabian culture, owls are seen as bad omens. Traditionally, Arab people usually liken a person who is always pessimistic and angry to an owl. In Arab mythology, the owl bird represents anxiety and bad luck. The Arabs were gloomy about the owl bird in pre-Islamic

times, seeing it as a symbol of death and devastation. They thought that an owl visiting a person’s home would be a sign of impending death and a sign of gloom. The old proverb, “Follow an owl, and it will guide you to ruin,” was common in the ancient Arab tradition. This contrasts greatly with the symbolism of owls in the West, where they represent knowledge and wisdom. The differing symbolisms result in non-equivalence even with literal translations. This led the subtitler to exchange this metaphor with a likening to a devil. Although this rendition portrays the negativity of the source text it diverges from the form and degree of the source text. Furthermore, it invokes religious concepts which were otherwise deemed foreignizing. Instead, the translator could have retained the comparison to a bird by replacing the owl with a crow, which carries similar connotations in the target culture.

In example 7, a person is likened to a “الغضنفر alghudanfar,” which is a term for a large, strong lion to describe his ferocity. Rendering this term simply as a lion could weaken its implications but would still be acceptable. To fully encapsulate the ferocity of the lion of the source text and retain the strangeness of the term, the translation could have likened the man to the mythological Nemean lion. Yet, the subtitlers still resorted to substitution. In the target text, the man was likened to a hulk, which is a large thing or person.

These examples emphasize how symbolism and metaphor are not universal. This becomes an area of challenge when rendering idioms as literal translations may cause drastic shifts in meaning. This indicates that nonsensical renditions are not the worst possibility of the misapplication of translation strategies.

Literal Translation. In the examined data, some examples were translated literally (Table 4). Idioms, however, cannot be

Table 4 Examples of translation idiomatic expressions literally.

Strategy	No.	Source text (Arabic)	Literal translation	Target text
Literal	8	الحب هيعيه	Love will blind him	Love will blind him
	9	يادي التحس	What a jinx	What a jinx
	10	إِنَّا لِلَّهِ إِلَيْهِ رَأْجُونَ	We belong to Allah and to Him we shall return.	To Allah, we belong, and to Him, we will return.
	11	إِنَّمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمَوْتِ بِدِهْرٍ فَمَنِ الْعَارُ أَنْ تَمُوتَ جَبَانًا.	If death is inevitable, then it is a shame to die a coward.	If death is inevitable, it is a shame to die a coward.
	12	أَهْفَاكِرْ هَا بِسْ خَدْ بَالِكْ أَنَا لَحْمِي مِنْ	Yes, I remembered it. But, take care; my flesh is bitter.	Yes, but you know that my flesh is very bitter.

Table 5 Examples of translation idiomatic expressions by omission.

Strategy	No.	Source text (Arabic)	Literal translation	Target text
Omission	13	بِسْ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ الْكَوْمَبَوْدَ الَّذِي احْنَا فِيهِ دَهْ.	But in the name of God, God willing, after this compound, we are in.	Now, after seeing this huge edifice.
	14	عَلَى بَرْكَةِ اللَّهِ مَعْلَشْ أَهْدِي كَدَهْ وَصَلِي عَالَنْبِيِّ.	With God's blessing	-
	15	لَا يَمْكُنْ يَا مَعْلَمْ خَيْرِكَ سَابِقَ	Relax. Keep calm and pray upon the prophet.	Sorry. Just calm down.
	16		It is not possible, teacher; your goodness preceded	Oh no, sir, I can't.

comprehended by translating their constituent parts separately. Thus, it does not make sense to translate them literally.

In example 8, one character utters, "Love will blind him". This phrase is similar in form and meaning to the English idiom "love is blind." Both expressions indicate that loving someone clouds a person's judgment, resulting in biased and unrealistic feelings. Since the phrase is used in both languages to convey the same meaning, a literal rendition is acceptable. While the exact phrasing differs slightly, like the tense, for instance, the meaning is still accessible to the target audience.

Example 9 is similar to example 8 as it contains an idiom that is used in both languages. The expression "what a jinx" is used when a person senses that nothing is going their way for inexplicable reasons and can only be rationalized as bad luck.

Example 10 includes the saying Muslims use when faced with the death of someone they care about. It is a reminder that death is inevitable. To Muslims, this line is equivalent to the Christian "dust to dust, ashes to ashes." Since Christianity is more common among anglophones, this phrase has become known to most English speakers. Therefore, it would have been an acceptable rendition as it conveys the same sentiment. However, taking this approach would replace the connotations of the Islamic religion with those of Christianity. The translator decided to retain the original line, maintaining the characters' religious identity. Although literal translation was used on this cultural expression, the meaning was not lost on the audience as the sense of the phrase is clear from its components.

Example 11 is an excerpt from a poem by the Arab poet Abu Al-Tayeb Al-Mutanabbi, which is uttered by one of the characters. When rendering literary allusions, a translator may replace the quote with a similar one from the target culture. Since the subtitler could not find a substitution, the line was translated literally. This is an acceptable strategy that retains the cultural elements of the source text. Yet, non-Arab viewers are probably unfamiliar with the poem from which the line is quoted. Therefore, the fact the line is a reference may go unnoticed by

them. Placing the excerpt between quotation marks could deliver this fact regardless of the audience's level of familiarity.

In example 12, a character exclaims that he refuses to be belittled with an idiomatic expression. The expression states, "My flesh is bitter", implying that it is not easily edible, metaphorically describing the person's willingness to fight back. This line is translated literally, resulting in an incomprehensible subtitle. Like most idioms, the intended meaning is derived from previous knowledge and not linguistic components. Since content is separate from form, formal equivalence is mostly irrelevant, as highlighted by this example. Instead, such expressions are better translated based on their sense with common or idiomatic language.

Omission. In some expressions, the subtitler chooses to use the omission strategy either because there is no equivalent when they encounter forbidden words or because there is repetition; translators may choose to exclude certain words (Table 5). Nevertheless, some translators employ this strategy randomly, neglecting to consider the significance of the context or the information being delivered. In general, omitting something is not a good idea and should only be used as a last resort because it occasionally has the potential to change the meaning entirely.

The utterance in example 13 is deeply cultural and stems from the beliefs of Muslims and Arabs. It is believed that being envious of the blessings of others may jinx them. This jinx is known as "حسد", which is the Arabic term for envy. To avoid spoiling the blessings of others, Muslims recite "in the name of God, God willing" as a form of prayer that acts as a reminder of the source of all blessings. The concept of envy is similar to that of the evil eye and that of jinxing good luck. Yet, even these Western concepts are not as popular in their cultures. To avoid jinxes, English speakers often use the phrases "touch wood" or "knock on wood". However, the context in which these expressions are used is more limited than that of the source text. Mostly, they are used to hoping things go well in the future with less concern for

Table 6 Examples of translation idiomatic expressions by paraphrase using a related word.

Strategy	No.	Source text (Arabic)	Literal translation	Target text
paraphrase using a related word	17	غوري بقا	Get lost, then.	Get out of my sight
	18	ما تفتش أنا فهمت العبارة و سرك في بير	Don't worry. I understood the story, and your secret is in a well.	Rest assured. Understood, and your secret is preserved.
	19	احترم نفسك ده بابا	Respect yourself. This is my father.	Show some respect, he's my father.
	20	جري ايه يا عم أنت؟ جري ايه ما تقول كلمة طيبة يا تسك.	What happened, uncle? What happened? Either you say a kind word or keep quiet	What's wrong with you, man? Speak well or hold your tongue.

the present. Thus, the phrases are not interchangeable even when disregarding the religious connotations of the source text. In this example, the utterance was still meaningful without the interjection, which led the subtitled to omit it.

Examples 14 and 15 highlight how general sense was prioritized over culture in this translation. The phrase “with god’s blessing” did not appear in the target text. Instead, the subtitle simply states, “ok then”. The source text emphasizes Arabs’ relationship to God and how they entrust even the most basic aspects of their lives to Him.

In example 15, the expression “pray on the prophet” appears again. In this utterance, it is preceded by the line “Calm down.” Since calming down is the implicature of the phrase, and culture is being subsided in this translation, the phrase was omitted. Reusing the same rendition as discussed above would have caused redundancy.

Example 16, خيرك سابق, “your goodness preceded” was not rendered. Of course, the literal translation does not convey the exact meaning of the SL expression, which is considered one of the expressions of courtesy. It means that a person’s goodness and generosity are very great for others and that he is a generous and giving person who has many favours for people. This phrase is also used to express gratitude in some situations as if you’re telling him/her that you haven’t done much and that your efforts pale in comparison to what he/she initially gave to you. However, the subtitled could have translated the SL expression as “It’s the least I can do in return” or “I can never repay you for all you’ve done.”

Paraphrase using a related word. Another translation strategy that is used to translate the idiomatic expressions is translation by paraphrasing using a related word (Table 6). This is used when the idea expressed by the source item is lexicalized in the target language but in a different form. There are four expressions translated by using this strategy.

While most idioms are created from words unrelated to their sense, there are cases where the keyword reflects part of the meaning of the idiom. Since the sense is related to the main element, the word can be retained in the translation even when paraphrase is employed. This is evident in examples 17–20.

In Example 17, غوري بقا was translated as “Get out of my sight”. The Egyptian expression is used a lot in different contexts and conversations to express anger at someone. It means to go too far or disappear now. The same expression exists in the TL with the same connotation meaning. Therefore, we can argue that the subtitled chose the appropriate expression in the TL to translate the SL one.

Example 18 contains the idiom “Your secret is in a well”. This metaphorical expression assures the person that the speaker is trustworthy and would keep their secret. The meaning of this

expression states that the secret will be well kept in a deep, dark place rather than out in the open. The subtitles paraphrase the line to convey its meaning. The rendition states, “Your secret is preserved.” This statement retains the word secret and the sense of the idiom while diverging from its idiomatic form.

In example 19, a character is urged to be respectful in their attitude and manners. The Arabic text states, “Respect yourself,” while its English translation states, “Show some respect.” These phrases, which are identical in function and similar but not exact in form, show the differing views of respect between the two cultures. In Arabian culture, it is believed that one’s manners are a reflection of themselves and their upbringing. Thus, it is their duty to retain respect for the sake of their character. On the other hand, “show some respect” indicates that respect is related to other people. Furthermore, it is something that is given based on the merit of the other person and thus collocates with the terms “owe” and “earn.” This led the subtitled to paraphrase the source text and change the object of the sentence.

Example 20, ما تقول كلمة طيبة يا نسكت was translated as “Speak well or hold your tongue.” The literal translation of this expression is “Either you say a kind word or keep quiet.” The SL expression is used when two people are quarreling, and a third person says something that increases the problem between them, so it is said to the third person either to say what makes them calm down or to keep silent. The provided translation conveys the meaning appropriately since the meaning of the idiom “hold your tongue” is not to speak and keep silent. There is another expression that conveys the same meaning as well: “Say well or be still.”

Paraphrasing using unrelated word. Since the sense of an idiom is not intrinsically linked with the sense of its lexical components, the same meaning can be presented through unrelated terms. This paraphrase can also be done between two languages. This can be seen in the examples in Table 7 where the sense of the idiom was rendered by discarding its form through the strategy of paraphrase.

Example 21 contains the idiom “place it (as) a piercing in your ear”. This line is metaphorical as the pronoun “it” does not refer to an actual earring but instead represents an utterance. The idiom is used to notify the listener that what is about to be said is of importance and should not leave the person’s thoughts. The idea here is that speech enters the human mind through their ears. Since earrings stay on a person’s ears for prolonged periods, the speaker asks that this statement does the same. A direct way to convey this is by saying, “Keep this in mind,” which is the line that appeared in the subtitle.

Example 22 states, “Won’t take a water’s boil;” this expression is used to express the swiftness and ease one plan to execute their

Table 7 Examples of translation idiomatic expressions by paraphrasing using unrelated word.

Strategy	No.	Source text (Arabic)	Literal translation	Target text
paraphrasing using unrelated word	21	حَلْفَةٌ حَاجَةٌ حَطْهَا	I'll tell you something and place it (as) a piercing in your ears.	I'll tell you something. Keep this in mind.
	22	يَا بَأْنَفْسِي أَخْلَصُ عَلَيْهِ مَشْ	Oh, oh, oh, I want to finish with him. He won't take t a water's boil into my hands	Dad, I want to kill him so badly, he wouldn't last a second in my grip.
	23	حَلْوَةٌ إِنْتَ صَدِيقٌ؟	-Are you his friend? - Soul by soul	-Are you his friend? - I'm his best friend.
	24	الرُّوحُ بِالرُّوحِ يَاخْوِي اللَّى يَعِيشُ	My brother, whoever lives will see.	Life is full of surprises.
	25	يَامَا يَشْوَفُ مَوْتٌ يَا حَمَارٌ	Die, donkey!	It won't happen!

desire. This expression is replaced with the phrase “wouldn’t last a second”. This phrase references time, implying the ease of the action with the speed it is completed in, as the difficulty of the task typically increases the time its execution requires.

In example 23 one character describes his friendship with another with the idiom “soul with soul”. This expression is used to describe a deepness and closeness in a relationship, distinguishing it from surface-level relationships. Typically, such a bond is rare and exclusive. In other words, such a description is reserved for one person. Therefore, the friend described with this idiom must be the person’s best friend. The term best friend was the provided equivalent on this basis. However, describing this idiom as an indirect way to refer to a best friend oversimplifies and diminishes aspects of its meaning. Therefore, while this rendition is acceptable, it is not an exact equivalent.

Example 24 يَاخْوِي اللَّى يَعِيشُ was rendered as “Life is full of surprises.” The literal translation of the SL idiom is “Whoever lives will see.” The SL idiom means that in your everyday life, you will face different stances and situations that make you learn more and increase your awareness in this life, so the longer one lives, the more strange things he sees, the more experienced he gets. This idiom is said to a young person who still does not have enough experience, and he/she witnesses or sees a situation for the first time and gets shocked or surprised, or when a person himself sees a strange situation, so he says it to himself. However, the subtitle paraphrased the implicit meaning of the idiom, and the meaning could be clear, but there are better equivalents that could be more appropriate and understandable to the target audience, such as “Live and learn” and “you haven’t gone anywhere or done anything.”

Example 25 مَوْتٌ يَا حَمَارٌ was translated as “It won’t happen.” The literal translation of the SL idiom “Die, donkey!”. It is an idiom that the Egyptians repeat to indicate negligence and procrastination in completing a task, or in some cases, a task that will not be completed at all. For the purpose of evaluating the translation, we have to shed light on the story behind this idiom. According to the narrations, this idiom goes back to an ancient ruler who saw a donkey entering his orchard, so he ordered it to be brought and killed. One of the ministers tried to convince him that it was an animal that did not understand and should not be executed for doing this, but the ruler insisted on his position in order to teach the donkey the royal rules. To get out of the situation, a man came forward and offered to the ruler that he would teach the donkey the royal rules, but on the condition that the ruler gives him a period of 10 years and a palace in which to live to teach the donkey. The ruler agreed to this offer in exchange for the fact that he would snap the man’s neck if he failed in the task of teaching the donkey the royal rules. So the man quickly

went out to tell his wife what had happened. She asked him what the ruler would do to him because, of course, he would fail in his mission. He replied to her, saying: “After ten years, either the ruler will die, or I will die, or the donkey will die.” and “Die, donkey!”. And since that time, people started to use مَوْتٌ يَا حَمَارٌ as an idiom. The provided translation conveyed the intended meaning. However, there is an equivalent in the TL that says, “You have to wait donkey’s years.”

Using an idiom of similar meaning but a different form. Using an idiom of similar meaning but a different form is common when translating idiomatic expressions (Table 8). The two following examples were rendered by applying this strategy.

Example 26 contains an idiom that is used to tell another person not to interfere. The exact wording states, “Stick to yourself”. While this string of words means “do not interfere with my business” in Arabic, in English they have a different use. Therefore, a literal translation would shift the sense from that of the source text to mean “minimize your social interactions” instead. This indicates that literal translation would be unacceptable. Hence, the line was subtitled as “mind your own business”, expressing the correct sense instead of following the original form. Moreover, since the target language phrase is also an idiom, the idiomatic nature of the utterance was retained minimizing stylistic loss.

The idiom “the weather is safe” in example 27 is used to inform an accomplice that they can proceed safely without being caught. In other words, there is no one around to witness the act, allowing the person to progress their plans. This idiom is used in the same contexts as the English idiom “the coast is clear” to express the same meaning. Thus, the English idiom replaced the Arabic idiom as its source text equivalent.

Transliteration. Example 28 was translated by applying the transliteration strategy, which means writing the Arabic word in English letters (Table 9). Translators usually resort to this strategy when the source language word does not exist in the target language. The acceptability and effectiveness of transliteration are affected by the text context and cultural and linguistic context. For instance, it can be used to retain cultural flavor when a foreignized approach is followed, or it may be used more naturally when a word becomes familiar as it slowly enters the lexicon as a loan word.

The phrase “Inshallah,” which literally translates as “God willing,” is used by Muslims on a daily basis. Although the term is in Arabic, its religious connotations led to its use among non-Arabic speakers. While its use is mostly limited to Muslims, its

Table 8 Examples of translation idiomatic expressions using an idiom of similar meaning but a different form.

Strategy	No.	Source text (Arabic)	Literal translation	Target text
Using an idiom of similar meaning but a different form	26	خليك في حالك	Stick to yourself	Mind your own business
	27	الجو أمان يابا	The weather is safe, dad	The coast is clear, dad

Table 9 Examples of translation idiomatic expressions by Transliteration.

Strategy	No.	Source text (Arabic)	Literal translation	Target text
Transliteration	28	إن شاء الله	God willing	Inshallah

meaning began to seep into the consciousness of nonbelievers through their interactions with Muslims. This allows for some acceptability in its retention, yet the possibility of unfamiliarity and a resulting lack of understanding is still a high risk. Therefore, a more direct translation strategy may have been better suited.

Mistranslation. In some examples, the subtitler mistranslated the SL expression either because he didn't understand the meaning of it or because of the lack of searching for a suitable meaning (Table 10). The following three examples were mistranslated.

Example 29 contains the phrase حسبي الله و نعم الوكيل . This phrase comes from a Qur'anic verse and is used as a prayer. The literal translation of the utterance is "Allah is Sufficient for me, and He is the Best Disposer of affairs" and is used mostly in moments of helplessness, more specifically oppression. The speaker asks God for both aid and patience when they know that there is nothing else they can do. This use differs from the use of the exclamation "goodness gracious" which replaced it in the target text. Here the sense was shifted from a request for strength and support to an expression of surprise. This classifies this rendition as a translation error. Instead, the line could have been rendered as the English prayers "Lord help me" or "Lord give me strength" or had its intention explicated as "may God deal with you".

Example 30, "from the star," is used to describe the early morning. Although there are countless stars in the night sky, the idiom refers to a specific star, which is the sun. In other words, the idiom is the equivalent of the English saying "the crack of dawn." However, instead of using this phrase or other possible equivalents like "the break of day" or "bright and early," the target text states "at the earliest." This phrase is a clause and not a complete sentence. If the phrase was preceded by a time, it indicates that the thing at hand will not happen before then. This does not align with the sense of the original utterance. If the clause had been preceded by a phrase like "opportunity" or "chance possible," then it could have been an acceptable rendition. The state in which it occurred can only be classified as a mistranslation.

Example 31 is an expression of gratitude. The literal wording states, "Your favor is above my head". This means that the person will always honor what the other has done and never forget it. To translate the sense of this phrase, the line "I will forever be grateful" is appropriate. The subtitles state, "I will never forget your kindness." Though this rendition would generally be seen as an accurate equivalent, it is considered a mistranslation here. The subtitler uses explication, specifying the favor as kindness. Yet the context of the movie shows that the favor was far from kindness.

In fact, the character claims he appreciates the harshness his grandfather showed, which he believes makes him stronger.

Discussion

Several studies have been conducted concerning translating idioms, the reasons behind the difficulties in translating such expressions, as well as the most used strategies to translate them. According to previous literature, it was found that the difficulties translators encounter in rendering idiomatic and culturally bound expressions can be due to many factors (Obeidat, 2023; Saed et al., 2023). Firstly, the degree of their familiarity with these idioms and cultural expressions. Secondly, their linguistic ability to identify a suitable equivalent and the inability to translate these expressions using the proper or appropriate equivalent. Thirdly, the idiom is translated literally without understanding it. Finally, there is a lack of knowledge of translation strategies. It was also found that the most common strategies used for resolving these challenges include paraphrasing, followed by literal translation, followed by omission.

The analysis above demonstrated that when translating idiomatic expressions, literal translation is not always the best method to resort to. Moreover, the analysis also revealed that literal translation did not accurately deliver the intended meaning, and the target audience may not comprehend the implicit meanings of the idiomatic expressions. Since the idiomatic expressions are related to culture, subtitlers should make an effort to seek out the closest natural equivalent of the SL idiom in the TL culture. This is consistent with Nida (1964), who stated that the translator's role is to ease the transmission of the message from one language to another and provide an equal response to the recipients. However, if the subtitler does not find a suitable equivalent, the "paraphrase" strategy will be better used to translate the connotative meanings of the idiom, not its literal translation. By doing so, the implicit meaning of the idiom becomes explicit and easier for the target audience to understand. This is in harmony with Baker (1992), who stated that the strategy of paraphrasing is used when there is no TL idiomatic counterpart for the SL idiom or when the target language's style is different from the SL; the paraphrasing approach is applied. Such a finding is in harmony with the outcome of Al-Assaf (2019), who conducted a study about translating idioms from English to Arabic based on Baker's taxonomy of translation strategies of idioms; she found that paraphrasing strategy was regularly used in translating English idioms into Arabic.

The findings of this research study are in line with Ali and Al-Rushaidi (2017), who studied the challenges of translating idiomatic expressions and found that the major difficulties are related to finding proper equivalents, misunderstanding the idiom's meaning, using literal translation, and eliminating the full or a portion of the idiom without compensation. These results have been confirmed by the current study, particularly the section about mistranslating the idioms due to misunderstanding of the SL expression, unfamiliarity with the TL culture, or inability to seek out a suitable equivalent. The current study found that cultural expressions, especially idiomatic expressions that have a religious background or are related to culture, are challenging to subtitlers. Such expressions are not lexicalized in the target language, and this is, according to Baker (1992), one of the common problems of non-equivalence. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that applying

Table 10 Examples of mistranslating idiomatic expressions.

Strategy	No.	Source text (Arabic)	Literal translation	Target text
Mistranslation	29	حسبي الله و نعم الوكيل فيك يا جابر يا شرقاوي	Allah is Sufficient for me, and He is the Best Disposer of affairs, O Jabir O Elsharkawy	Goodness gracious, Jabir Elsharkawy!
	30	بكر الصبح هنشتري الحاجات؟ من النجمة	Tomorrow morning, we will buy the things?	We're going to buy the things tomorrow?
	31	أنا جميلك فوق راسي يا جدي	From the star Your favour is above my head, Grandpa	At the earliest. From Beijing, I tell him, I will not forget your kindness.

the “cultural substitution” strategy is one way to address these kinds of situations (Dweik & Suleiman, 2013). This finding is in line with Mughazy (2016), who proposes that substitution could be one of the best translation strategies when facing expressions that have cultural connotations. In addition, based on the examples above, this study revealed that ‘cultural substitution’ is the most used translation strategy when rendering idioms.

This research can assist subtitleers in improving their abilities to translate idiomatic expressions. Both the source and target cultures should be familiar to subtitleers. They should go above and beyond when translating idiomatic expressions since these types of expressions demand the subtitleers to find appropriate and comprehended equivalence in the target language. Subtitleers ought to make every effort to steer clear of the omission method, especially if the language pairs have similar syntactic and semantic structuring. It is important to note that translators occasionally use the omission strategy when a phrase gives the entire statement a new ring or is socially acceptable in language A but not in language B.

Finally, it is worth noting that most movies frequently utilize idiomatic expressions; therefore, subtitleers should focus on developing an appropriate and special glossary for that. Translators can benefit from this study, especially those who want to subtitle movies. Students studying translation who are interested in translating idiomatic expressions may also find it useful.

Conclusions

Rendering idiomatic expressions is a complicated and challenging area of translation. This area of translation is difficult to avoid in AVT as many movies employ idiomatic translation to create a natural-sounding dialogue with a cultural flavor. There are strategies that subtitleers may employ to overcome this challenge.

Idiomatic expressions do not derive their meaning from the words that make up the sentence. Thus, literal translation that provides the equivalent for each word is an inadequate strategy. Instead, the intended sense should be the priority of the rendition. Transmitting the accurate sense is possible through strategies such as paraphrase. Paraphrasing is an adequate strategy for rendering the intended meaning but may result in stylistic loss. Substituting the source language idiom with a target language idiom could help maintain the idiomatic nature of the utterance.

While conveying the sense of the text is the priority, there is also the issue of culture. Some strategies may follow the conveniences of the source language foreignizing the translation but retaining the cultural flavor. Other strategies could be more domesticating resulting in a more naturalized text. Foreignizing strategies include literal translation and transliteration while domesticating strategies include paraphrasing and cultural substitution. Translators must decide on an approach to provide a consistent translation style or merge the two depending on context and relevance. Translations that do not reflect neither the sense, style, or culture of the source text are mistranslations and are unacceptable.

This study investigated translating common Arabic idioms into English. Subtitling of other formulaic sequences, such as lexical bundles, lexical phrases, and collocations, to mention a few, can be covered in future studies. Moreover, the Egyptian dialect was examined in this study; other Arabic dialects and language pairs could be studied in future research. In addition, other scholars can look at various movie genres, such as tragedy, action, and thrill, to mention a few. The volume of the data is another constraint. Only thirty-one cases were examined in this study. Additional instances and data analysis based on other translation theories can be conducted by other scholars. Furthermore, the current study focused on the linguistic and cultural elements of subtitling. Future studies may provide further insights into the interaction of sound and image and the role they play in the translation of idioms. Emphasizing the influence of the multimodal nature of AV material and para and extra-linguistic features on translation strategies and audience perceptions.

Data availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Received: 24 February 2024; Accepted: 10 June 2024;

Published online: 22 July 2024

References

- Abu-Rayash H, Haider AS, Al-Adwan A (2023) Strategies of translating swear words into Arabic: a case study of a parallel corpus of Netflix English-Arabic movie subtitles. *Humanit. Soc. Sci. Commun.* 10(1):1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-01506-3>
- Abu-Sayyeh A-F (2004) Translation of English idioms into Arabic. *Babel. Rev. Int. de la Trad. / Int. J. Transl.* 50(2):114–131. <https://doi.org/10.1075/babel.50.2.03abu>
- Ajaaj MA, Mohammed HN (2014) Cultural implications in the translatability of English food idioms into Arabic. *Al-Ustath J.* 2:1–8
- Akbari M (2013) The role of culture in translation. *J. Acad. Appl. Stud.* 3(8):13–21
- Al-assaf A (2019) Translating Idioms from English into Arabic: Appointment with Death as a Case Study. *Arab World Engl. J., Theses ID* 230:1–51. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej.th.230>
- Al-Khawaldeh N, Jaradat A, Al-Momani H, Bani-Khair B (2016) Figurative idiomatic language: Strategies and difficulties of understanding English idioms. *Int. J. Appl. Linguist. Engl. Lit.* 5(6):119–133. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijael.v.5n.6p.119>
- Al-Shawi M, Mahadi TST (2012) Strategies for translating idioms from Arabic into English and vice versa. *J. Am. Arab. Acad. Sci. Technol.* 3(6):139–147
- Al-Yasin N, Rabab'ah GA (2019) Arabic audiovisual translation of taboo words in American hip hop movies: A contrastive study. *Babel. Rev. Int. de la Trad. / Int. J. Transl.* 65(2):222–248. <https://doi.org/10.1075/babel.00090.aly>
- Al-Zgoul O, Al-Salman S (2022) Fansubbers' Subtitling Strategies of Swear Words from English into Arabic in the Bad Boys Movies. *Open Cult. Stud.* 6(1):199–217. <https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2022-0156>

- Al Mubarak AA (2017) The challenges of translating idioms from Arabic into English a closer look at al imam Al Mahdi University-Sudan. *Int. J. Comp. Lit. Transl. Stud.* 5(1):53–64. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijcls.v.5n.1p.53>
- Alabbasi, A (2009). Towards a constructive cultural interaction via audio-visual translation (Arabic-English). In H. C. Omar (Ed.), *The sustainability of the translation field* (pp. 179-189). Malaysia: ITBM
- Ali H, Al-Rushaidi SM (2017) Translating Idiomatic Expressions from English into Arabic: Difficulties and Strategies. *Arab World Engl. J.* 7(4):187–201. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej.vol7no4.13>
- Aulia Safitri, N, Sartika, D, & Yelia, Y (2023). *The Strategies Used in Translating Idioms In The Indonesian Subtitles Of Netflix 2022 Series' Wednesday*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Jambi, Indonesia
- Baker M (1992) In other words: A Course Book on Translation. Routledge, London and New York
- Bassnett S (2013) Translation. Routledge, London
- Chiaro, D (2012). Audiovisual translation. In C. Chapelle (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of applied linguistics* (pp. 30-34). New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons
- Dabbagh A (2017) Cultural Linguistics as an investigative framework for paremiology: comparing time in English and Persian. *Int. J. Appl. Linguist.* 27(3):577–595. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12162>
- De Linde Z, Kay N (2016) The semiotics of subtitling. Routledge, New York and London
- Debbas M, Haider AS (2020) Overcoming Cultural Constraints in Translating English Series: A Case Study of Subtitling Family Guy into Arabic. *3L: Lang., Linguist., Lit.* 26(1):1–17. <https://doi.org/10.17576/3l-2020-2601-01>
- Destaria M, Rini YP (2019) Analysis of Translation Strategy in Transferring meaning of English Idiom into Bahasa Indonesia in the subtitle of Pitch Perfect 3 Movie. *Engl. Educ.* J. Tadris Bhs. Ingg. 12(1):34–48. <https://doi.org/10.24042/ee-jtbi.v12i1.4429>
- Díaz-Cintas J (2005) Audiovisual Translation Today—A question of accessibility for all. *Transl. Today* 4:3–5
- Díaz-Cintas, J, & Massidá, S (2019). Technological advances in audiovisual translation. In M. O'Hagan (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Technology* (pp. 255–270). London: Routledge
- Díaz-Cintas J, Remael A (2014) Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling. Routledge, London
- Dweik BS, Suleiman M (2013) Problems encountered in translating cultural expressions from Arabic into English. *Int. J. Engl. Linguist.* 3(5):47. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v3n5p47>
- Fahmi MEE (2016) A cross-cultural study of some selected Arabic proverbs and their English translation equivalents: A contrastive approach. *Int. J. Comp. Lit. Transl. Stud.* 4(2):51–57. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijcls.v.4n.2p.51>
- Farghal M (1993) Arab fatalism and translation from Arabic into English. *Target. Int. J. Transl. Stud.* 5(1):43–53. <https://doi.org/10.1075/target.5.1.04far>
- Farghal M (2020) Translating Arabic metaphorical expressions into English: Mahfouz's morning and evening talk as an example. *Int. J. Arabic-Engl. Stud.* 20(1):105–124. <https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes2000.20.1.6>
- Farghal M, Al-Hamly M (2015) Arabic proverbs in fiction translation: Girls of Riyadh as an example. *Jordan J. Mod. Lang. Lit.* 7(1):1–20
- Farghal M, Haider AS (2023) English dog expressions: Categorisation, structure, attitude, semantic molecules, and translatability into Arabic. *Train., Lang. Cult.* 7(3):41–58. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2521-42x-2023-7-3-41-58>
- Fedulenkova T (2019) Pragmatic functions of modern English phraseology. Научный результат Вопросы теоретической и прикладной лингвистики 5(2):74–83. <https://doi.org/10.47689/2181-1415-vol2-iss4/s-pp313-317>
- González, LP (2009). Audiovisual translation. In M. Baker & G. Saldaña (Eds.), *Routledge encyclopedia of translation studies* (pp. 13-20). London: Routledge
- Haider AS, Saideen B, Hussein RF (2023) Subtitling Taboo Expressions from a Conservative to a More Liberal Culture: The Case of the Arab TV Series Jinn. *Middle East J. Cult. Commun.* 16(4):1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18739865-tat00006>
- Jibreel I (2023) Online Machine Translation Efficiency in Translating Fixed Expressions Between English and Arabic (Proverbs as a Case-in-Point). *Theory Pract. Lang. Stud.* 13(5):1148–1158. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1305.07>
- Li, S, Chen, J, Yuan, S, Wu, X, Yang, H, Tao, S, & Xiao, Y (2024). *Translate meanings, not just words: Idiomkb's role in optimizing idiomatic translation with language models*. Paper presented at the Proceedings of the AAAI Conference on Artificial Intelligence, Vancouver, Canada
- Mel'cuk, I (1995). Phrasemes in language and phraseology in linguistics. In L. Everaert (Ed.), *Idioms: Structural psychological perspectives* (pp. 167-232). United States: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Mughazy M (2016) The Georgetown Guide to Arabic-English Translation. Georgetown University Press, Washington
- Nida EA (1964) Toward a science of translating. E.J. Brill, Leiden
- Obeidat MM (2023) Translating Culture in the Jordanian TV Comedy Series "al jar gabl al dar"(My American Neighbor) Into English. *SAGE Open* 13(3):21582440231197011. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231197011>
- Ordudari M (2007) Translation Procedures, Strategies and Methods. *Translation J.* 11(3):1–9. <https://www3.uji.es/~aferna/EA0921/6c-Translating-culture-procedures.pdf>
- Paquot, M (2015). Lexicography and phraseology. In D. Biber & R. Reppen (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of English corpus linguistics* (pp. 460-477). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Perego, E, & Pacinotti, R (2020). Audiovisual translation through the ages. In L. Bogucki & M. Deckert (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of audiovisual translation* (pp. 33-56). London: Palgrave Macmillan
- Pérez-González L (2014) Audiovisual translation: Theories, methods and issues. Routledge, London
- Romero-Fresco P (2009) More haste less speed: Edited versus verbatim respoken subtitles. *Vigo Int. J. Appl. Linguist.* 6:109–133
- Saed H, Haider AS, Tair SA (2023) Gender, Sexual, Ethnic, Color and Disability-related Epithets and Labels Across Languages: Evidence from Arabic Subtitling of English Movies and Series. *Eurasia. J. Appl. Linguist.* 9(1):213–225. <https://doi.org/10.32601/ejal.901018>
- Salman SDS (2015) Pragmatic Equivalence in Subtitling Arabic Culture-Specific Idiomatic Expressions into English. *CDELT. Occal Pap. Dev. Engl. Educ.* 60(2):163–192. <https://doi.org/10.21608/opde.2015.77304>
- Samha, F, Haider, AS, & Hussein, RF (2023). Address forms in Egyptian vernacular and their English equivalence: A translation-oriented study. *Ampersand*, 100117. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amper.2023.100117>
- Shanti Manipusika Y, Reska Julia Winzami D (2021) Translation of idioms: How they are reflected in movie subtitling. *AWEJ Transl. Lit. Stud.* 5(1):113–125. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awejts.vol5no1.8>
- Shhaiber R, Haider AS (2023) Strategies of Subtitling Egyptian Idiomatic Expressions and Proverbs into English. *Lang. Value* 16(2):60–99. <https://doi.org/10.6035/languagev.7015>
- Sutrisno B, Lestari NP, Rachmawati B (2023) Strategies Used in Translating Idiomatic Expressions in The Subtitle of "Beauty and The Beast" Movie. *J. Engl. Lang. Lit.* 8(02):277–290. <https://doi.org/10.37110/jell.v8i02.192>
- Thalhi, MB, & Dweik, BS (2015). *The Translation of Proverbs: Obstacles and Strategies*. (MA). Middel East Universitiy, Jordan. Retrieved from https://meuedujo/libraryTheses/5871fd344b5b6_1.pdf
- Williams J (1990) The translation of culture-specific terms. *Lebende Sprache*, 35(2):55–58
- Xalilova K, Atoyeva D (2023) The Usage of Idioms in Speaking. *Mod. Sci. Res.* 2(9):362–364
- Zitawi J (2003) English-Arabic dubbed children's cartoons: Strategies of translating idioms. *Across Lang. Cult.* 4(2):237–251. <https://doi.org/10.1556/acr.4.2003.2.5>

Acknowledgements

This research received grant no. (80/2023) from the Arab Observatory for Translation (an affiliate of ALECSO), which is supported by the Literature, Publishing & Translation Commission in Saudi Arabia.

Author contributions

Ahmad S Haider: Study conception and design; analysis and interpretation of the data, manuscript drafting, and the final approval of the version to be published. Reem Shuhaimi: data collection; analysis and interpretation of the data, manuscript drafting, and the final approval of the version to be published. Both authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Informed consent

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Additional information

Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to Ahmad S. Haider.

Reprints and permission information is available at <http://www.nature.com/reprints>

Publisher's note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

© The Author(s) 2024