
A Functional Approach to Linguistic Problems in Islamic Subtitling

Mohammad Ibrahim Mansy, Ph.D.
Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt
Corresponding email: mmansy1981@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the linguistic challenges encountered in subtitling Islamic TV programs from Arabic to English. The formal and cultural discrepancies between the two languages cause some gaps in translation between them given their different lexical and grammatical systems. Linguistic features such as polysemy, semantic change, idioms as well as description of grammatical rules are common pitfalls that cause mistranslations in this area. These difficulties are further complicated by the space and time constraints which limit the amount of text shown on the screen and, thus, prevent the subtitler from clarifying ambiguous sections of the ST. Christian Nord's functional translation-oriented text analysis model is employed to analyze a sample of four real-life examples taken from programs broadcast on Al-Arabiya Channel and Iqraa TV. Findings show that documentary translation is suitable for the problems of lexical complexity while instrumental translation can overcome the difficulties of translating idioms and description of Arabic grammar to English-speaking viewers. Besides, the strategies of omission, condensation and compensation seem to be a necessity together with creative adaptations to maximize the communicativeness of the subtitles.

1. Introduction

This research explores the applicability of Nord's (1997) functional model to analyzing linguistic challenges in Islamic subtitles from Arabic into English. These challenges do not only emanate from the discrepancies between the two languages, but also from the space and time constraints imposed by the medium which restrict the translator's freedom to relay the ST effectively. Some Islamic TV channels e.g. Iqraa TV started to translate their Arabic programs into English to address the needs of Muslims abroad, especially in the West, and to acquaint Westerners with Islam in order to establish communication bridges between the two cultures. Translators encounter a wide range of difficulties including technical, cultural, rhetorical and informational challenges, but the current article investigates the linguistic pitfalls that complicate the work of the subtitler.

1.1 Statement of the research problem

Arabic and English belong to different language families which entails a considerable distance between them at the formal and cultural levels. This makes it more difficult to communicate ideas and meanings between them than between languages which are closer linguistically and culturally (English and German, for example). Normes (1999) argues that "The dissimilarity between languages creates differences that simply cannot be overcome, inevitably compromising the activity of translation" (p. 18). Linguistic phenomena such as polysemy, semantic change, idioms and special grammatical features are

among the most common pitfalls encountered by subtitlers of Islamic programs in translating from Arabic into English. While translation strategies like explication, paraphrase and footnotes can help the traditional translator to overcome such difficulties, many of these strategies seem to be impossible in subtitling due to the space and time limitations. This requires more creativity on the part of the subtitler who is expected to translate faithfully, produce meaningful subtitles which must also be concise, simple and clear to the target viewers and meet the technical limitations of the medium.

1.2 Research questions

- 1- What is the nature of linguistic pitfalls involved in subtitling Islamic TV programs from Arabic to English?
- 2- Which translation strategies are most appropriate to overcome these pitfalls?
- 3- How far do technical constraints affect the efficiency of subtitles and translation decisions?
- 4- To what extent is the Functional Approach effective in analyzing the problems of subtitling and offering solutions to them?

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Subtitling: A special form of translation

According to Gottlieb (1998), subtitling is a form of translation on the screen that has two features setting it apart from other forms of translation: "semiotic composition" and "time and duration" (p. 245). The first element refers to the shift of the channel of communication from "verbal auditory" (soundtrack of the original dialogue) to "verbal visual" (translated subtitles appearing on the screen). This shift leads to heavy loss in the semantic and cultural content of the original via translation, for no one can guarantee that "a film that is partly read can convey the same impression as the same film listened to" (ibid). The second element, i.e. time and duration, is one of the hardest challenges encountered by subtitlers. It refers to the duration of the subtitle on the screen, and this is a challenge because the subtitler has to convey as much as possible of the spoken dialogue in a written form, given the following considerations: First, the subtitle lasts for a few seconds on the screen (an average of 2-6 seconds). Second, it cannot exceed two lines (each line consists maximally of 37 characters, including spaces and punctuation marks). Third, it must be readable, in the sense that it should be concise enough for viewers to read during these few seconds regardless of the speed of the speaker(s). Gottlieb (1998) maintains that

Most television broadcasters demand a two-line subtitle of 60-70 characters to stay on the screen for 5-6 seconds, and presentation rates of more than 12 characters per second (cps) are not acceptable. Given that the speech tempo on the screen, as in normal conversation, is usually higher than the equivalent of 12 cps, a quantitative dialogue reduction is necessary. Due to lexical and syntactic differences between languages, this average measure of reduction may vary, but in television subtitling the text volume is typically reduced by one third (p. 247).

In fact, there are some variations to this reading speed. For example, at Iqraa TV (from which most of the current sample is taken), a reading speed of 13 cps is allowed, and this will serve as the standard in the current study. It is now clear that subtitling is different from traditional text translation in a number of ways. (1) It is a constrained type of translation (Titford, 1982) because subtitles cannot exceed a certain number of characters and duration on the screen. This means that it is (2) reductionist as it involves omission and condensation due to the space and time limitations. (3) Subtitling is also supplementary in the sense that subtitles (TT) do not replace the original soundtrack (ST), but they coexist to maximize the communicativeness of the audiovisual material for the target viewers. In this sense, subtitling is also described as (4) a multimodal and polysemiotic means of communication because it involves both written and spoken discourses as well as verbal and nonverbal elements that include the images, sound effects and other acoustic elements.

2.2 The role of pragmatics

Because of the technical limitations of the medium, subtitlers do not have enough space to write everything uttered by the speakers. Therefore, they have to translate the gist of the dialog, and the speaker's intention is more important than the actual words. Furthermore, the speaker's body language, gestures, tone of voice, even silence, can be pregnant with significant meaning that is not stated explicitly, and only the interlocutors can understand. In translating this information on the screen, the subtitler has to be aware of the deeper and covert pragmatic implications of these features in order to spill them out efficiently not only to a different language/culture, but also in a totally different mode of expression that has space and time constraints. Gottlieb (1998) asserts:

In subtitling, the speech act is always in focus; intentions and effects are more important than isolated lexical elements. This pragmatic dimension leaves the subtitler free to take certain linguistic liberties, bearing in mind that each subtitle must be phrased and cued as part of a larger polysemiotic whole aimed at unimpeded audience reception. (p. 247).

2.3 The functional approach

Translation, especially subtitling, is much more complex than simple inter-linguistic transfer: translation has intersections with pragmatics, cultural studies, communication studies and more. The purpose of translation, its place and time and the relationship between the source and target cultures all play a role in shaping the translation decisions. These dimensions have been taken into account in functionalist approaches to translation, especially Christiane Nord's (1997) Translation-Oriented Text Analysis Model which comprises the following components:

- i- The importance of the translation brief.** This component provides the following information: (1) the intended text function (informative, expressive, appellative or audio-medial); (2) the addressees (sender and receiver); (3) the time and place of text reception; (4) the medium (speech or writing) over which the text is transmitted; and (5) the motive (why the ST was written and why it is being translated) (Nord, 1997, p. 60; and Munday, 2001, p. 82).
- ii- The role of the ST analysis.** This includes the following elements: (1) subject matter; (2) content, including connotation and cohesion; (3) presuppositions (real-world factors of the communicative situation taken to form the participants' cultural background); (4) composition (including microstructure and macrostructure); (5) non-verbal elements, e.g. images, music and sound effects, italics, etc.; (6) lexical elements: including dialect, register and specific terminology; (7) sentence structure; (8) suprasegmental features, including stress, tone, rhythm, and 'stylistic punctuation', e.g. parentheses, brackets, dashes, ellipsis, etc. (Munday, 2001, p. 83).
- iii- The functional hierarchy of translation problems** consists of the following elements: (1) the appropriate type of translation (documentary or instrumental); (2) functional elements that will need to be adapted to the TT addressee's situation; (3) the translation style (source-culture or target-culture oriented); and (4) tackling the problems of the text at lower linguistic levels (as in the ST analysis in the second component above).

Nord highlights two major translation types that can be used to overcome different translation problems: documentary and instrumental. Examples of documentary translation include literal, word-for-word (interlinear), philological (exegetic, learned) and exoticizing translation strategies, where the ST form, content and/or situation are reproduced in the TT. These strategies focus on the morphological, lexical and syntactic ST features (Nord, 1997, pp. 47-48). On the other hand, instrumental translation includes freer translation strategies such as modulation, omission, equivalence, adaptation, transcreation,

euphemization and paraphrasing. This model is adopted to analyze the selected sample in this study due to its comprehensiveness and attention to the cultural and pragmatic aspects of subtitling.

3. Methodology

3.1 The sample

The sample consists of four real examples (utterances) and their translations which are taken from three different programs broadcast on Al-Arabiya Channel and Iqraa TV, namely *على خطى العرب* (In the Footsteps of the Arabs), *نساء خالدات* (Immortal Women) and *دعوة للفرح* (A Call to Happiness)¹. These have been obtained by the kind permission of respective officials in both channels. The sample covers different topics (history, biographical information, monotheism, the Prophet's life, etc.), and they have been translated by different subtitlers. The aim of this is to find out different translation problems as well as the translation strategies used to overcome them.

3.2 Method of data analysis

Nord's translation-oriented text analysis model outlined above is used to analyze the selected sample due to its comprehensiveness and relevance to the research questions of the study. For example, the translation brief (first component of the model) gives information about the time and place of the ST and TT, the sender and receiver and their socio-cultural backgrounds which is crucial for the translation decisions and strategies which question 2 attempts to answer. The second component helps to answer the first question through the analysis of the ST. Moreover, the third component helps to answer the second question as it guides the subtitler to employ the most appropriate translation types and styles that are relevant to the communicative situation.

3.3 Procedures

- 1- The four examples are classified under four subcategories: polysemy, semantic change, idioms and explaining Arabic grammar.
- 2- Each example is presented along with background information about the context of the utterance, the episode and program it is taken from to facilitate full understanding of the utterance.
- 3- The original Arabic (ST), its first translation (TT-1) and a revised translation (TT-2) are cited in a three-column table. The first (leftmost) column contains the written script of the ST along with its duration onscreen by seconds [ST (Dur. 5.5 sec.)]. The second column contains the translation done by the first subtitler along with the number of characters and the reading rate (character per second or cps) explained earlier [TT-1 (132/ 24 cps)]. The last column cites the revised subtitle done by a more experienced translator/editor observing the technical restrictions and quality standards of the channel, as the following table illustrates:

ST (Dur. 5.5 sec.)	TT-1 (132/ 24 cps)	TT-2 (54/10 cps)
يقول الله عز وجل، بعد أعود بالله من الشيطان الرجيم بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم	God, the Almighty, said After seeking refuge in God from the cursed Satan In the name of God the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful	God, exalted and glorified is He, says in this chapter:

¹ These are the names of the programs as translated by the broadcasters.

- 4- The ST and the two TTs are then analyzed in light of Christiane Nord's tri-partite model. Translation problems and strategies used to overcome them are identified. The TTs are compared and the more adequate/functional one is recommended.
- 5- In case none of the TTs is adequate or there is a better way to rephrase any of them, the researcher suggests his own version at the end of the analysis.

4. Analysis

4.1 Polysemous words

Arabic vocabulary items are so rich that a single word can carry a wide range of meanings, sometimes related (polysemous) and sometimes unrelated (homonymous), but they are described here as polysemous for simplification. One source of this multiplicity of meanings is the existence of 'technical', religious or specialized senses for words which also have 'general' senses. An example of this is the word **توحيد** which occurs in the following utterance taken from episode 29 of the program **على خطى العرب** (In the Footsteps of the Arabs), a documentary that relates the history of the Arabian Peninsula. In this particular episode, the presenter and the guest — who is a Saudi royal — speak about the unification of Saudi Arabia on religious bases.

ST (Dur. 6 sec.)	TT-1 (60/ 10 cps)	TT-2 (54/9 cps)
<p>إذا يا سمو الأمير هذا المكان شهد أعظم وحدة سياسية</p> <p>لبناء الدولة الوطنية تحت راية التوحيد</p> <p>والذي اتفق عليها الرجلين الرجلان العظيمان اللذان هم محمد بن سعود والإمام محمد بن عبد الوهاب</p>	<p>So this place witnessed the greatest political unity</p> <p>that built the national State under the banner of <u>unification</u></p> <p>by Imam Muhammad ibn Saud and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab.</p>	<p>So, this place witnessed the greatest political unity</p> <p>that built the national state under the banner of <u>Islam</u></p> <p>by Imam Muhammad ibn Saud and Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab.</p>

As for the (i) translation brief, (1) the ST and TTs are equifunctional in the sense that all of them are informative (relating historical facts) and expressive (lauding the founders and judging the unity as "greatest", although the third subtitle is less expressive in TT-1 and TT-2 than the ST). (2) The ST sender is the program presenter who is hosting a Saudi prince to talk about the establishment of the Saudi Kingdom, and the receivers are Arab viewers. The TT-1 and TT-2 senders are freelancers (a translator and a reviewer, respectively) hired by Al-Arabiya TV to air this program to English-speaking viewers (3) in 2019 through satellite TV all over the world. (4) The ST is a spoken dialog while the TTs are written subtitles that supplement the original audiovisual material. (5) The ST and TTs' motive is to raise the viewers' awareness of the history and culture of the Arabian Peninsula, especially Saudi Arabia.

(ii) The ST analysis includes the following points: (1) The subject matter is historical accounts of the roots of the Saudi Kingdom, and how its rise led to Islamic revival in the Arabian Peninsula. (2) There are many historical connotations in this utterance. Referring to the city of Dir'iyya (the original home of the Saudi dynasty) earlier in the episode, the presenter is trying to stress the legitimacy of the Saudi regime by linking it to religious revivalism and the alliance between Muhammad ibn Saud (1685-1765), the progenitor of the current royal family, and Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab (1703-1792), the founder of Wahhabism, a religious reform movement. This is also how cohesion works in the three subtitles cited in the table above, which

is symbolic of the claimed cohesion between religion and politics in the presenter's words. (3) Although this program can be watched and understood by all Arab viewers, the immediate audience addressed by the speakers are Saudis who are told to take pride in their national heritage by highlighting different archeological sites and cultural elements in the Saudi environment. Part of this culture is its allegedly strict version of Islam which is based on the so-called Wahhabism whose founder is also mentioned by name. It is usually equated with an uncompromising application of Islamic monotheism known in Arabic as *توحيد* i.e. oneness of God (Baalabaki, 1995, p. 388 and Wehr, 1976, p. 1055) which was the core of Imam Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab's movement from which the Saudi regime derives its legitimacy. This is highlighted by the speakers to remind the (Saudi) viewers of this historical period, and maybe to urge them to trust their current government. (4) The composition of the subtitle in question can be problematic, and it has caused a mistranslation in TT-1. Microstructurally, it consists of two phrases which are parts of a longer sentence that runs over the three subtitles, and so it should be relocated within its macrostructure. That is why both the preceding and succeeding subtitles are also cited to provide more linguistic and cultural context. More macrostructure should even be taken into account, for what the TT-1 translator failed to do is to interpret this subtitle in light of the whole message of the episode. Three minutes earlier in the show, the guest speaker reiterated:

الدولة هذه قامت على هذا الأساس؛ قامت على أساس/ هذا التحالف الذي يعطي الإسلام القيمة الأولى في حياة الناس،/ يجمع شمل الناس تحت راية الإسلام بما تكونت جميع مكوناتها؛ العدل المساواة بين الناس، التناغم الشمل،/ القضاء على ما كان هنا من التشرذم والحروب...

This state was established on the basis of this alliance /that presented Islam as a prime value in people's life./ **It united the people under the banner of Islam** and its values:/ justice, equality, and reunification./ It ended the fragmentation and wars among the people ...

In other words, the guest speaker used the same collocation, *تحت راية* (under the banner of) previously, and it is used in the subtitle in question as well, but he made it explicit that this unification of Saudi Arabia was achieved “under the banner of *Islam*” whose central doctrine is monotheism — the technical sense of the problematic word *التوحيد*. However, the TT-1 translator opted for the general sense *unification*, confused by the talk about the *unification* of people in one nation-state by the two leaders mentioned above, thus producing the awkward collocation “under the banner of unification”. This mistranslation emanates from the translator's failure to ask himself: “*Do I know the exact meaning of the words in this context?*” (Gottlieb, 1994, p. 109). Di Giovanni also points to this problem, highlighting “the need to understand the context in order to bridge two cultures appropriately.” (2016, p. 3).

(5) Some non-verbal elements are present with the utterance on the screen (e.g. background music; the speakers' tour in the ruins of the old city of Dir'iyya, etc.). Therefore, the TTs have favorable cps rates (10 and 9 cps), enabling the viewers to watch the video and enjoy other filmic material. (6) The problematic lexical item here is the polysemous word *التوحيد* which has a general sense i.e. *unification* and a technical, religious, specialized one, i.e. *monotheism* which is a central Islamic doctrine and is sometimes taken to mean *Islam*, hence the collocation *دين التوحيد* (literally, the religion of monotheism). The TT-1 translator did not realize this complexity of the term and opted for the general meaning. But whether he made this mistake because of his unawareness of this semantic complexity or because of his heedlessness to the macrostructure of the episode is unknown. It is clear, however, that he was distracted by the mention of the literal ‘unification’ and ‘political unity’ (وحدة سياسية) of the kingdom under the Saudi dynasty. In addition to this problematic word, a few ST lexical items, i.e. *يا سمو الأمير* (your Royal Highness) are omitted from the TTs because the addressee is known onscreen and this form of address does not bear meanings very significant to the message. They are deleted to abridge the subtitle and to make it more readable. (7) The sentence structure is quiet simple and there is nothing difficult about it except that the analyzed subtitle does not stand alone. Both the TTs have managed to link it to the previous utterance, and, thus, they run smoothly although the next subtitle does not seem to run naturally after them, so

it needs to be reformulated. (8) There are no special suprasegmental features in these utterances perhaps due to the declarative tone which is typical of the informative function.

The third part of Nord's model is the (iii) functional hierarchy of translation problems detailed as follows: (1) The translation type applied in this subtitle is documentary translation because it is a simple statement of historical facts although the subtitles can be reformulated to run more fluently. (2) The functional elements adapted to the TT addressee's situation include deletion of redundant vocabulary in the last subtitle, namely "والذي اتفق عليها الرجلين الرجلان العظيمان واللي هم" as well as standardizing هم واللي into more formal English or deleting them to keep the same level of language. (3) The translation style is source-culture oriented; both TTs use the calque *under the banner of* as a translation of the original تحت راية. (4) Issues pertaining to lower linguistic levels include the morphological mistake the presenter made in mispronouncing the nominative الرجلان as if it were an accusative الرجلين before quickly correcting himself and code-switching from the formal to the informal اللي هم. These slips are characteristic of spoken discourse and are avoided in both translations.

Suggested reformulation: This city witnessed the political unification of Saudi Arabia/as a nation-state under the banner of Islam/ following the visions of Imams Muhammad ibn Saud and Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahhab.

Semantic change

A polysemous word has different senses that function in modern day. However, there are some words which have undergone semantic change in the sense that they used to have one (or more) meaning(s) in the past, but it has been overshadowed by modern meanings. Because classical Arabic is still alive in religious discourse (Badawi, 1973, p. 126), these 'archaic' meanings pop up from time to time, escaping the attention of the inexperienced translator, and causing mistranslations. The following example is taken from the fixed introduction to the episodes of the series نساء خالديات (Immortal Women), a documentary commemorating famous and great female figures in Islamic history. This silent introduction shows visual signs at historical or archeological sites associated with those great figures, e.g. shrines, mosques, ancient madrassas or battlefields. The example here is a sign (a visual-verbal element) on a column inside the Prophet's Mosque in Medina named after his wife Aisha. The sign refers to the column thus: "هذه اسطوانة السيدة عائشة" and is clear on the screen.

ST (Dur. 2.7 sec.)	TT-1 (53/ 20.3 cps)	TT-2 (47/18 cps)
هذه اسطوانة السيدة عائشة (رضي الله عنها)	Here is a CD about Ayesha, a wife of prophet Muhamed	(The Column of Aisha, Wife of Prophet Muhammad.)

(i) The translation brief includes the following information. (1) The ST text functions are informative (name of the column) and expressive (showing veneration for the Prophet's wife Aisha through the supplication رضي الله عنها). The TTs' function is only informative, enhanced by *deleting* the expressive part and *adding* more information, namely "Wife of Prophet Muhammad". (2) The ST sender is the program producers (Iqraa TV), and the receivers are Muslim Arab viewers. The TTs' senders are Iqraa translators and the receivers are English-speaking audiences all over the globe, Muslim and non-Muslim. (3) This program was produced in 2012 and was watched over satellite TV. (4) The ST under analysis is a written sign on a column shown in a close-up on the screen. The TTs are written subtitles accompanying that visual element. (5) The ST is part of a TV documentary whose aim is to commemorate great Muslim women and to show the viewers the distinguished status of women in

Islam, which is also the motive of the translation although it is addressed to international audiences who have no access to the original Arabic ST.

(ii) The ST analysis is as follows. (1) The subject matter is historical and biographical accounts of great Muslim women. (2) In terms of content, the sign is written in beautiful Arabic calligraphy (in the *thuluth script*) which is typical of such religious contexts, and it is used here as a token of veneration for the Prophet's wife — which is also expressed in the common formula *رضي الله عنها* and the prefix *السيدة* both of which are deleted and compensated for as (iii-2) below demonstrates. The more significant part in terms of the informative function is *هذه اسطوانة السيدة عائشة* which is the central content for the TTs. In terms of cohesion, this part of the episode is self-contained semantically and syntactically although the translator should have also considered other parts of the episode to discern the intended meaning of the problematic word. (3) As for presuppositions, the ST viewers are aware of the person referred to in the sign, especially the name is preceded by the honorific prefix *السيدة* (Lady) and followed by the formulaic expression *رضي الله عنها* (May God be pleased with her). This background knowledge is most probably unknown to non-Muslims who may happen to be watching and reading the subtitles. Thus, the TTs have deleted these honorific parts and added more information about her — that she is the Prophet's wife. Pettit (2009) asserts that “The image situates the narrative within a specific geographical, historical, temporal and cultural context. Although cross-cultural codes might be present in the image, there will also be culture-specific visual signs which do not exist in the target culture” (p. 50). These culture-specific elements have been omitted and compensated for in the TTs. (4) The ST's artistic composition is significant in that it parallels the semantic, communicative value of its respective parts. In other words, the informative segment *هذه اسطوانة السيدة عائشة* is written in a font size much bigger than the expressive segment *رضي الله عنها* which anticipates the omission of this formula for technical and communicative reasons.

(5) The screen at this part of the episode abounds with many non-verbal elements: Besides the loud background music, it is so rich visually as it contains shots from inside the Prophet's Mosque in Medina with all its colorful decorations and calligraphies including the sign on the column under analysis. It is strange that the TT-1 translator did not pay attention to all this and opted for a very recent meaning of the word *اسطوانة* which resulted in an outright translation mistake as explained in the following point. (6) The honorific lexical elements have been explained in (2), (3) and (4) above. However, the problematic word which caused the mistranslation is *اسطوانة* rendered in TT-1 as *CD* and in TT-2 as *column*. Hans Wehr (1976, p. 16) and Baalbaki (1995, p. 105) give different meanings for this polysemous word including (a) column, (b) cylinder, (c) phonograph record, (d) roller, (e) drum, among others. It is clear that *CD* is not an original meaning of the word, but only an extension of (c) above. Baalbaki gives the meaning *disc*, a sense that outshined the others due to the proliferation of that technological device (the compact disc) that is simply referred to by its initials. Why the translator made this mistake is perhaps because she did not watch the video and was translating from the script only, and so she opted for the famous sense of the word. Or perhaps she was not aware that *اسطوانة* could have other meanings and thus did not look up this word in the dictionary to check its meanings. At any rate, the mistake resulted from a complete misunderstanding of the context in which this lexical item occurred. (7) The ST sentence structure is simple and unproblematic although the demonstrative article in the ST *هذه* has been replaced by *Here* in TT-1 due to the translator's misunderstanding of the context, and was deleted altogether from TT-2 perhaps due to its redundancy since it is self-evident that the sign refers to the column on which it is hung. Demonstrative articles are not normally used in signs which are kept succinct and concise. (8) There are no suprasegmental features in the sign since it is written, not spoken, although the different script sizes of the Arabic sign can function as ‘stylistic punctuation’ where words in bigger font are perceived as more semantically important than those in smaller font, as explained in (4) above.

(iii) The functional hierarchy of translation problems is detailed as follows. (1) Both documentary and instrumental translations are employed in this example: the former represented in the literal meaning of the complex word, and the latter represented in the compensation strategies applied to make up for the omission incurred. Therefore, grammar translation omission, addition and reformulation are adopted, as clear in the suggested solution below. (2) Functional elements that need to be adapted to the TT addressee's situation include considerable reduction due to the short presentation time (2.7 seconds). Both TT-1 and TT-2 are still too long and they need further condensation. Moreover, as mentioned above, honorific references to the Prophet's wife, e.g. السيدة الله عنها and رضي الله عنها have been deleted and replaced by "Wife of Prophet Muhammad" which is reckoned to be more informative to the TRs who, if they are not Muslim, would like to know who Aisha was, and what granted her the honor of having a pillar in the Prophet's Mosque named after her. Therefore, omission and addition occur in the same subtitle to provide information thought to be more relevant to the target viewers. (3) Therefore, the translation style is target-culture oriented. (4) Lower-level linguistic problems include the word اسطوانة whose modern meaning *CD* in TT-1 has been replaced by its archaic meaning *column* which is also 'more loyal' to the image on the screen. Furthermore, the TT-1 translator uses non-standard name spellings, e.g. *Ayasha* and *Muhamed* and does not capitalize *prophet* before his name, all of which are unacceptable according to Iqraa quality standards. Hence, they have been replaced by the standardized *Aisha*, *Muhammad* and *Prophet*, respectively. Additionally, "wife" has been capitalized to add more veneration to this great Muslim figure who is often referred to as "Mother of the Believers". This particular example is a manifestation of Ramos Pinto's observation that adequate subtitles are not merely a written translation of the verbal input in films; rather, they are an attempt at conveying the interaction between different modes of communication on the screen, i.e., the dialog, images, sounds, setting and the sociocultural context (2018, pp. 19-20).

Although TT-2 above is more communicative for the target viewers, it is still longer than the ideal reading rate (13 cps), and viewers will thus find it difficult to read the entire 47-character subtitle in just 2.7 seconds. Therefore, a shorter version is suggested: "Column of Aisha, the Prophet's wife" (34 characters; 13 cps).

4.3 Arabic idioms

Linguistic challenges in translation are by no means confined to single words; they cover all aspects of linguistic analysis. Among these difficulties is the translation of idioms which lie at an intersection between language and culture and are sometimes regarded as culture-specific references (CSRs). The following example is excerpted from the 18th episode of the 2010 Ramadan series دعوة للفرح (A Call to Happiness) where the preacher relates a story involving the Prophet and some of his Companions.

ST (Dur. 5.2 sec.)	TT-1 (190/ 36.3 cps)	TT-2 (64/12.2 cps)
فأقبل عمرو بن العاص فلما رآه صلى الله عليه وسلم تهلل وجهه كأنه القمر ليلة 14 عليه الصلاة والسلام	So, Amr ibn Al-As came, and when the Prophet, peace and blessings of God be upon him, saw him, his face rejoiced as if it were the moon on the 14th night , peace and blessings be upon him.	When Prophet Muhammad saw Amr, his face radiated with happiness .

(i) The translation brief is detailed as follows: (1) The ST functions are basically informative (recounting the story of Amr ibn Al-As' conversion to Islam) and expressive (as clear in the simile comparing the Prophet's face to the full moon in its beauty). These two functions are replicated in TT-1 although the simile is replaced with a metaphor in TT-2 which is more

succinct. (2) The ST sender is the preacher while the receivers are his congregation in the mosque and Arab Muslims who are watching at home. The TT sender is a translator at Iqraa Subtitling Center and the receivers are international viewers around the world whose religious and cultural backgrounds are diverse. (3) This series was aired daily during the month of Ramadan in 2010 on Iqraa international satellite channels. (4) The ST medium is speech while the TT is written subtitles. (5) The motive behind the ST is to help Muslims (Arabs in this case) to lead a happier life through highlighting lessons from the Islamic tradition while the TT's purpose is to disseminate this message to the wider world by addressing English-speaking viewership who could be non-Muslims as well.

(ii) The ST analysis comprises the following elements: (1) The subject matter is biographical information about a Muslim figure. (2) The ST talks about two characters, i.e. Prophet Muhammad and his Companion Amr ibn Al-As. However, the preacher does not mention the Prophet's name, nor does he even say "the Prophet". Instead, he uses an honorific formula that is usually used to express devotion and reverence to him, namely *صلى الله عليه وسلم* and *عليه الصلاة والسلام* which are translated literally in TT-1 as "peace and blessings of God be upon him" and "peace and blessings be upon him", respectively. The two phrases under analysis are *تهلل وجهه* and *كانه القمر ليلة 14*, the former is an Arabic collocation denoting joy, while the latter is a famous idiom describing the beauty of a person's face. Both these elements are adapted to the TT's communicative situation as (iii-2) below explains. Moreover, the speaker uses *fa-* (then) as a cohesive marker twice in the ST to link the different clauses. However, there is no parallel use of *then* in the TTs which reformulate the message differently using *So* and *and* (TT-1) and only *When* (TT-2) adapting it to target language norms. (3) Two presuppositions might have been taken into consideration when the translation decisions were made. First, non-Muslim (non-Arab) viewers would not recognize the referent to whom the honorific formulas are made. Second, the image of the moon on the 14th night being a symbol of beauty might be specific to Arabic. Therefore, these two elements are adapted to the TRs' communicative situation. (4) With regards to the ST composition, the microstructure has two prominent features: redundancy as clear in the slightly varied repetition of *صلى الله عليه وسلم* and the ellipsis of the Prophet's name. This ellipsis is common in Arabic because the audience automatically knows that the Prophet is meant. This background knowledge is not possessed by non-Muslim viewers of the translated show, and thus the Prophet's name is prioritized in TT-2. Macrostructurally, this utterance is a digression from the main thread which is typical of that particular preacher. Therefore, it has been linked to the main theme of the episode and the series by referring to the concepts of happiness and joy, and this has been achieved in the TTs.

(5) Non-verbal elements are represented in the speaker's body language and smile which mirror the description of the Prophet's reaction when he saw Amr ibn Al-As. Therefore, TT-2 is abridged by almost two thirds (from 190 characters in TT-1 to only 64 in TT-2) to enable the viewers to observe this parallelism and to enhance the message in their heads. (6) Lexical elements are marked by redundancy in the ST: the formulaic expression *صلى الله عليه وسلم* is repeated twice with little variation, so it is deleted from TT-2 because it belongs to the Islamic religious register and has no equivalent in the TC. Additionally, *تهلل وجهه* and *كانه القمر ليلة 14* are two idiomatic expressions that are not translated literally in TT-2 where they are paraphrased and reformulated to give a more explicit meaning. (7) There is a great discrepancy between the sentence structures of the three versions: while TT-1 imitates the complex accumulation of clauses of the ST, TT-2 reduces the 6-clause utterance to only two clauses connected by the adverbial *when* at the beginning. This simplification makes it much easier for the target viewers to read and understand. (8) No suprasegmental features are present in this utterance which is articulated in a declarative tone that harmonizes with the dominant informative function.

The third component of Nord's model is (iii) the functional hierarchy of translation problems, described as follows: (1) Instrumental translation is adopted in TT-2 due to the adaptations made to align the message to TC norms as clear in: (2) (a) the simplification of the ST structure; (b) the reductive translation strategy, as clear in omitting two formulaic expressions due to both the space-time restrictions and the absence of an equivalent in the TL; (c) compensating for the omitted parts by adding the referent's name *Prophet Muhammad*; and (d) the two Arabic idiomatic expressions *تهلل وجهه* and *كانه القمر ليلة 14* have been merged into one English metaphor *radiated with happiness*, employing explicitation and reformulation at the same time. Despite this reduction to almost a third of what is actually said, the TT-2 is still faithful to the original because *his face radiated with happiness* reflects the meanings of both *تهلل وجهه* and *كانه القمر ليلة 14*. The collocation *تهلل وجهه* means to rejoice (Hans Wehr, 1976, p. 1030 and Baalbaki, 1995, p. 384), and this is reminiscent in *his face* and *with happiness*, while TT-2's *radiated* is so easy to associate with *القمر ليلة 14*. This analysis is in harmony with Kabara's (2015) emphasis that although subtitling is reductive in nature, condensation can preserve the essence of the original denotative meaning but in fewer words to comply with the time and space restrictions. That is, omitting language does not necessary entail "omitting meaning" (p. 169). (3) This also shows that the translation style is target-culture oriented. (4) Lower-level linguistic elements have been tackled in (ii-4, 6, 7 and iii-2) above. Finally, TT-2 is recommended owing to its functionality, fluency and communicativeness. @Neves (2004) asserts that

in audiovisual translation fidelity is particularly due to an audience that, like the receiver of simultaneous interpretation, is in need of communicative effectiveness, rather than in search of artistic effect — as is the case in literary translation — or of exact equivalence — as happens with technical translation (p. 135).

Description of Arabic grammar

Moving on to sentence structure, translation difficulties become more stubborn as the speaker explains the particularities of Arabic grammar which have no equivalent in English. This difficulty multiplies given the fleeting nature of subtitles and the very limited time and space available to explain the ST to the target viewers. The following example is taken from episode 12 of the Ramadan series *دعوة للفرح* (A Call to Happiness) where the preacher narrates a funny anecdote involving Al-Walid ibn Abdul-Malik, an Umayyad ruler and his cousin Umar ibn Abdul-Aziz, a notable scholar and a future Caliph. The former made a grammatical mistake as he was reciting a Qur'anic verse while delivering a Friday sermon that earned him the ridicule of the latter.

ST (Dur. sec.)	TT-1	TT-2
(3.5 sec.) اسمع بخطب الجمعة ويش يقول:	(57/ 16 cps) Listen to what he said while delivering the Friday sermon:	(48/13.7 cps) While Al-Walid was delivering the Friday sermon,
(5 sec.) قال: يقول العبد يوم القيامة: "يا ليتها كانت القاضية" هي القاضية	(97/19.4 cps) He said: "Some individuals will say on the Day of Resurrection: 'I wish that it would be my end!' "	(70/14 cps) he made a mistake in reciting the verse, "I wish that it'd be my end!"
(3.8 sec.) قال تأخذك وتريحنا منك!	(59/ 15.5 cps) Umar said: "May it be your end! It will be a relief for us!"	(35/9.2 cps) So, his cousin said, "Amen to that!"

(i) The translation brief includes the following points: (1) The ST text function is appellative (telling a funny story to make the congregation laugh). The subtitler tried to reproduce that function in the TT. (2) The ST sender is a famous preacher hired by Iqraa TV and the receivers are a congregation in the mosque and Iqraa Arab viewers. The TT sender is a subtitler working for Iqraa and the receivers are Western audiences who read the subtitles in English. (3) This program was aired in 2010

on satellite TV in the Arab World and globally. (4) The ST medium is speech while the TT medium is written subtitles fleeting on the screen. (5) The ST motive is to entertain the audience, a purpose that the translator tried to retain in the TT.

(ii) The ST analysis is broken down to the following points: (1) The subject matter of the whole episode is religious preaching aiming at boosting the viewers' morale. However, these particular utterances present a joke based on a witty comment on a grammatical mistake. (2) The content of the utterances is centered around the mispronunciation of a word in a famous Qur'anic verse [Q69:27] that depicts the regret, sorrow and horror that will be experienced by wicked people on the Day of Judgment. Because God will call them to account for their crimes and throw them into Hellfire, every one of them will cry: "I wish that it would be my end", asking for death but it will not be granted to him. The speaker here is saying that Al-Walid ibn Abdul-Malik, an Umayyad Caliph, recited this verse in his Friday sermon to admonish his congregation so that they might do good deeds and avoid that fate. However, he made a morphological mistake, pronouncing the word القاضية as *alqadiyatu* while it should be pronounced as *alqadiyata* according to Arabic grammar. That Caliph was not a very just ruler, a fact that enraged his pious cousin, Umar ibn Abdul-Aziz, who seized this opportunity to vent his anger and resentment by projecting the Qur'anic verse on him as a curse, meaning to say, "May your end come soon!" (3) Morphological inflection of words is known in Arabic, and words take different inflections in the form of suffixes, some of which are written in Arabic as the diacritics َ, ُ and ِ (pronounced as *-a*, *-u* and *-i*, respectively), depending on the case of the word and its function in the sentence. That is why the speaker explains this point to his Arab audience who learn the basics of Arabic grammar at school. However, because English does not use such case inflections, the subtitlers have presupposed that the TRs would not know them; therefore they omitted any reference to them in the TTs because they would not make any sense and would just consume more of the already limited space on the screen. However, the TT-2 subtitler compensated for this omission by stating that the original speaker made a grammatical mistake.

(4) The macrostructural composition of the three utterances is interesting in that it juxtaposes formal and informal discourse varieties: the first one is informal because it is the speaker's own words. The second utterance is in classical Arabic where he cites the Caliph and the Qur'anic verse. The last utterance is rather a mix between informal and classical Arabic because the vocabulary items are basically formal but his pronunciation is close to his local accent. This code-switching between different levels of Arabic adds to the comic effect of the utterances, a feature that disappears from the standardized TT. (5) Non-verbal elements include the giggle of the speaker and his congregation in the mosque. This puts pressure on the subtitler to make the translation funny in order to help the viewers understand why the congregation is laughing. (6) Besides the different registers and linguistic levels used in the utterances as underlined in (ii-4) above, the second utterance is the most lexically complex in that it contains religious terminology such as العبد and يوم القيامة because they are part of a sermon. It also contains the problematic word القاضية which is pronounced twice, the first in the ungrammatical way as part of a quotation, and the second in its correct pronunciation, as shown in (ii-3) above. These lexical items have undergone linguistic and cultural adaptations as explained in (iii-2) below. (7) Sentence structure has also undergone some adaptation: while the first sentence starts with an imperative verb اسمع and the other two are declarative statements, TT-2 has changed the imperative to a declarative to simplify the message and shorten the lines, resulting in rhetorical loss in the target version. (8) The ST is also rich in suprasegmental features that consolidate the rhetorical effect of the joke. For example, the first utterance which is the speaker's own words is articulated at a pitch lower than the following two ones which are quotations from the two historical characters he is talking about. This difference of pitch marks the transition from direct to reported speech. Moreover, in the second utterance, the speaker pronounces the second occurrence of the problematic word القاضية in a rising tone to draw the audience's attention that this is the correct

pronunciation of the word. Again, all these features are missed in the TT due to the linguistic particularities of Arabic, a fact that endorses Nornes' claim that "The dissimilarity between languages creates differences that simply cannot be overcome, inevitably compromising the activity of translation" (1999, p. 18).

These idiosyncrasies necessitate a description of (iii) the functional hierarchy of translation problems which includes the following components: (1) The TT-2 employs instrumental translation due to the many (2) functional elements adapted to the TT addressee's situation. First, the imperative in the first utterance has been replaced with a declarative voice because it is shorter and simpler. Second, the TT-2 subtitle added the name of the person the speaker is quoting (Al-Walid) in order not to confuse the viewers as to who is saying what, especially there is another participant (Umar), and just saying *he* as in the ST could confuse the TRs. Third, the word العبد which literally means a *slave* is avoided in both TT-1 and TT-2 due to its negative connotations. In a religious context like this, this word simply means a *person* or an *individual* as TT-1 has put it since any individual is a slave of God in Islamic discourse even if he is a free person. Therefore, TT-1 has chosen a modern equivalent while TT-2 has deleted it altogether along with the whole context of who will say that quotation and when. TT-2 incurred a huge loss, but the translator felt it was necessary owing to the spatio-temporal restrictions according to which the TT-2 is still longer than the standard reading rate despite this reduction. Fourth, reference to the different inflections of the word الفاضية which occurs twice in the ST is also omitted from both TT-1 and TT-2 because English has no equivalent for such a morphological feature. The humor is reproduced through the second person's comment on the mistake made by the first person which takes the form of a curse against him. The subtitle has used addition and reformulation in the first subtitle; omission, compensation by explication in the second and transcreation, omission and adaptation in the third. Perhaps the TT-2 subtitle did not state the name of Umar ibn Abdul-Aziz in the last subtitle as he did with Al-Walid in the first because he did not want to associate that pious person (who is highly respected in Islamic history) with uttering a curse for fear that the TRs might have a negative impression about him, an effect completely different from, even contradictory to, the effect created by the mention of that name in the SC. In this case, omission is employed to retain a similar effect in the TC. These adaptations are justified by Gottlieb's assertion that

In films and other artefacts from nondominant cultures, almost all such items will be known only to their original audiences. With subtitled productions from such minor speech communities, foreign audiences have to rely almost entirely on the informational content in the subtitles.... [S]ubtitling 'against the current' ... would be expected to display more explicatory, adaptive and deletive strategies (2009, p. 27).

(3) It is obvious, therefore, that the TT-2 is target-culture oriented. (4) Lower level linguistic problems have been analyzed in (ii-2, 3, 6, 7, 8) and (iii-2) above. Finally, despite the functionality of TT-2 in the last subtitle, it is too far from the original. Therefore, because the time and space allotted to this subtitle allow more text to be inserted, I propose the following alternative translation which is more loyal to the ST: "Umar said: 'Your end will be a relief to us!'" (44/ 11.5 cps).

5. Findings and discussion

The detailed application of Nord's functional model has revealed a number of features typical of Islamic subtitling. First, the ST comprises both formal and informal utterances, the latter is sometimes used to explain or comment on the former. This code-switching is a common characteristic of spoken discourse. However, informalities are standardized in the subtitles which follow the conventions of written discourse. This is one source of the stylistic incongruence between the spoken ST and the written TT and the irreversibility of subtitling. Second, grammatical and morphological mistakes in the ST are corrected in the TT, for mistakes are not tolerated in written discourse. Third, one aspect of the reductive nature of subtitling is that the informative function is prioritized in the TT over other (expressive and/or appellative) functions both for subtitles to be

communicative and simpler and to align them with the space and time constraints. Fourth, imperatives and direct speech in the ST are changed into declaratives and reported speech in the TT to simplify the structure, shorten the lines, and make the message more direct to facilitate the viewers' comprehension, given the fleeting subtitles on the screen.

Furthermore, omission and deletion are used together sometimes; the former to delete redundancies, less important details and information irrelevant to the TC, the latter to contextualize the subtitles, compensate the losses incurred by omission and to add background information necessary for the viewers to understand the translation.

5.1 Answering the research questions of the study

1- What is the nature of linguistic pitfalls involved in subtitling Islamic TV programs from Arabic to English?

This study does not claim to be exhaustive, but analysis of the sample has shown some of the most common pitfalls in this area of translation. Lexical complexity is one of these problems, and it can take the form of polysemy or semantic change both of which imply multiplicity of meanings. The former occurs when a word has more than one meaning who are still functional in modern day. One meaning can be technical and the other can be general. This is a pitfall because the subtitler can opt for a meaning which is not intended due to his unawareness of the other meaning(s), or because of inattention to the larger context or macrostructure of the episode. Semantic change occurs to a word that acquires new meanings that overshadow its original or classical ones. Mistranslations may occur if the subtitler opts for the new common meanings alone due to unawareness of the classical meanings and incompetence in classical Arabic which is still alive in religious discourse (Badawi, 1973). Although visual elements on the screen can provide clues to the intended meanings, some subtitlers ignore the complex, polysemiotic nature of subtitling and miss these clues because they translate from the script without watching the video. Therefore, all filmic components must be taken into consideration in the translation decisions.

Idioms, especially culture-specific ones, can also be a source of mistakes. Subtitlers who translate *from* their native tongue may take them for granted and translate them literally thinking that they exist in the TL with the same denotations and connotations. The moon, for instance is a symbol of beauty in Arabic while it is a symbol of "changeability and moodiness" in English (Tawfik, 2020, p. 63). Therefore, a literal translation of the moon idiom in the third example above could have mystified the meaning because the overall meaning of an idiom cannot be deduced from the separate words. Likewise, describing SL-specific grammatical rules in the ST is a major problem because they do not have a TL equivalent. These are actually untranslatable and their omission is inevitable, leading to translation loss which can cause viewers' dissatisfaction, especially if they form the backdrop of a certain situation or a joke. All these challenges are further complicated by the limited space on the screen which requires considerable summarization and condensation, and prevents the subtitler from providing necessary background information.

2- Which translation strategies are most appropriate to overcome these pitfalls?

Documentary translation strategies (e.g. literal and grammar translations) are appropriate for the problems of lexical complexity (polysemy and lexical change) since accuracy of the intended meaning are the aim in light of the context and macrostructure of the episode/program. The subtitler should also look up polysemous words in authoritative technical dictionaries even if s/he knows some of their general meanings. For semantic change, competence in classical Arabic and good use of dictionaries and other resources are essential. Moreover, the subtitler should pay attention to the polysemiotic structure of the

audiovisual material and try to find clues to the intended meaning in the images as well as verbal and non-verbal elements in the video.

Instrumental translation strategies like explicitation and paraphrase can be an efficient solution for culture-specific idioms although condensation is required to cope with the limited space on the screen. For the description of language-specific grammatical rules, instrumental techniques such as omission, compensation and explicitation are also effective since these rules do not exist in the TL. However, they can be referred to or explained in case the form the background of a certain situation described by the speaker.

In general, omission is necessary in most cases to delete irrelevant and less significant information and to comply with technical restrictions. Concise additions are useful in many cases to provide background information and context for the subtitles as a means of compensation. Reformulation of subtitles is indispensable to make them idiomatic, simple, legible and easily comprehensible for viewers. The subtitler is also expected to be flexible and creative in employing adaptations that suit the communicative situation s/he is reproduce in the TL. In short, “it is up to the translator... to reach a compromise between a desire to translate faithfully and the necessity of making alterations due to technical limitations” (Polcz, 2008, p. 294).

3- How far do technical constraints affect the efficiency of subtitles and translation decisions?

In order to produce viewer-friendly subtitles that can be read comfortably, the subtitler is forced to delete a considerable part of the ST message from the TT which causes translation loss. Examples of this include the omission of the expressive function from the TT where the informative one is prioritized to make the subtitles meaningful to the target viewers. However, this causes loss at the semantic, cultural, rhetorical and aesthetic levels. Compensation is recommended through adding some background information, but this is not always possible due to the limited space. That is why creativity is a big asset to close this gap, although it cannot be ensured. As a result, “All of us have, at one time or another, left a movie theater wanting to kill the translator. Our motive: the movie's murder by ‘incompetent’ subtitle” (Nornes, 1999, p. 17).

4- To what extent is the Functional Approach effective in analyzing the problems of subtitling and offering solutions to them?

Nord’s translation-oriented text analysis model has three components: the first covers pragmatic aspects and highlights the functional elements in both the ST and TT (function, motive, participants, place and time, etc.). This is crucial for the subtitler to know at the beginning in order to compare both ST and TT audiences, identify the purpose of the translation and the adaptations that suit the target viewers. Identifying the place and time of reception helps the subtitler take the source and target cultures into account when making the translation decisions. The second part of the model analyzes smaller linguistic elements in the ST such as the subject matter, content, lexical elements, sentence structure and suprasegmental features. The analysis has shown that this is useful in finding solutions to the linguistic problems. Moreover, the model covers textual elements such as the composition with its microstructure and macrostructure which are crucial for understanding the intended meanings of complex lexis and to produce accurate translations. The third component of Nord’s model identifies the ST elements that need to be adapted to the TRs’ communicative situation. This enables the translator to make insightful decisions as to the translation type and style that are most appropriate for that situation. This comprehensive model provides the subtitler with a bird’s-eye view of the whole text as one unit of communication (Nord, 1997, p. 67).

6. Conclusion

This study has investigated the linguistic challenges of subtitling Islamic TV programs from Arabic into English from a functional point of view. Using Nord's model to analyze the selected sample, translation problems tend to arise from polysemy, semantic change (especially when traditional meanings of lexical items become archaic), idioms as well as references to language-specific grammatical features. These translation traps are further complicated by the limited time and space allotted for subtitles on the screen — a limitation that restricts the translator's ability to explain certain information or compensate for losses caused by the technical constraints. Documentary translation has been found to be appropriate for lexical complexity while instrumental translation can solve the problems of translating idioms and SL-specific grammatical features. Omission, condensation and reformulation must be employed along the other strategies in a creative and flexible way to adapt the SL elements to the TL communicative situation and overcome the limitations of the medium.

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