Cultural Pitfalls in Islamic Subtitling

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Abstract

This research explores the challenges of translating cultural references in Islamic TV programs from Arabic into English. Subtitling is a constrained type of translation due to the space and time limitations on the screen. Apart from this challenge, the subtitler has to deal with cultural pitfalls that cannot be separated from a stormy global background that includes political and ideological tensions between the Muslim World and the West. This study investigates these difficulties, attempts to suggest solutions to them and identify the basic qualifications of competent subtitlers of this kind of programs. The ultimate purpose is to help establish healthy communication between Muslim and Western countries through translation which is an act of cultural mediation. To achieve this, three real-life examples and their subtitles have been selected from Iqraa TV programs and analyzed using Christiane Nord's functional model. Results show three types of cultural pitfalls typical of Islamic TV programs, i. e., Qur'anic allusions, Sunnah allusions and politicized issues. Instrumental translation has been found to be effective in overcoming these cultural pitfalls, while documentary translation proved to be ineffective due to the space limitations and its lack of clarity. Creativity, flexibility, and cultural sensitivity are indispensable for the subtitler to bridge the communication gaps between the source and target cultures.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the cultural difficulties encountered in subtitling Islamic TV programs from Arabic into English. These programs are generally meant to explain Islamic concepts to Muslims and non-Muslims who do not know Arabic, especially those who live in Western countries. In a world full of political and ideological clashes, especially between the Islamic and Western worlds, audiovisual translation (especially subtitling) is seen to be a form of intercultural communication, and subtitlers as "cultural mediators" (Moll, 2017, p. 334). Some Islamic TV channels (e.g., Iqraa) have been keen to subtitle their programs to English to facilitate mutual understanding between Arab Muslims and the Anglo-American world, and to alleviate these tensions through translation. Although subtitling this kind of programs abounds with a wide range of translation problems, the current research is concerned with cultural pitfalls which are among the most difficult translation problems due to their specificity to the source culture.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Cultural references in translation are classified into universal and culture-specific allusions. The former denotes general references that are known to people all over the world while the latter refer to cultural elements that are known in a specific culture. Pedersen (2010)

uses the terms *transcultural* and *monocultural* to refer to these two types, respectively. Of course, universal cultural references are easier to transfer from the SL to the TL. The real challenge is rendering the culture-specific references (CSRs) which require communicative translation strategies (e.g., explication, paraphrase, bracketing, footnotes, etc.) to explain them to the target viewers. This is sometimes made impossible by the space and time constraints on the screen which is typical of subtitling — a limitation that necessitates a great deal of adaptation or what Pedersen calls "benevolent intervention" to communicate the message to the target viewers (2010, p. 74).

However, technical restrictions and the specificity of the cultural references are not the only problems in Islamic subtitling. Another stubborn pitfall that faces the subtitler occurs when the original speaker talks about sensitive issues, or what Tawfik (2010) calls "politicized" terms such as *Jihad* which has negative connotations in the target culture (p. 9). The subtitler finds himself caught between a desire to translate faithfully and a desire to establish communication bridges with the target viewers. This leaves him perplexed as to what translation strategies can help strike a balance between these two requirements. The current research aims to help the subtitler resolve this conflict and fulfill his role as a cultural mediator.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY:

1- What is the nature of cultural pitfalls encountered in Islamic subtitling?

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

3- To what extent do the technical constraints affect the efficiency of subtitles and translation decisions?

4- What are the qualifications of a competent subtitler of Islamic TV programs?

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. NATURE OF SUBTITLING

Subtitles are the written translation of the dialog spoken by actors in movies, guests in TV programs or people in any audiovisual material. This translation appears in successive segments of one or two lines (one-liner or two-liner subtitles) at the bottom of the screen, and they flash in and out of the screen at an average rate of two to six (sometimes seven) seconds as the speaker(s) produce(s) new utterances. Subtitles are synchronized to each utterance's start and end points in the sense that a subtitle appears on the screen when a speaker starts a new utterance or resumes an utterance after a pause, and it vanishes when the speaker finishes an utterance or pauses to breathe. The technical arrangement which helps this process happen usually takes place prior to translation when another specialist or technician — known as the time-coder (sometimes the translator themself)— performs the timecoding or cueing in which s/he uses specialized software to 'cut' or divide the translation file into smaller slots known as cells. Each cell corresponds to an utterance and is proportionate to it in length and duration. It is in these slots or cells that subtitlers work later, and they 'fill' them with the translation of the utterances. When the work is finalized and the program is broadcast, the translation segments appear on the screen one after the other in what is known as subtitles. Because the subtitles are 'fleeting' and cannot be backtracked (on the TV), viewers have to read quickly to understand the message and enjoy other parts of the film, e.g., the images and action. To help them do so, subtitles must be as short and condensed as possible. 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).

There are some variations to this reading speed. For example, at Iqraa TV (from which 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 several 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 necessitates it to be (2) reductionist as it involves omission and condensation due to the space and time limitations. (3) It 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, video, sound effects and other acoustic elements. Chiaro (2008) summarizes this complex nature of subtitling in the following table:

	Visual	**Acoustic**
Non-verbal	scenery, lighting, costumes, etc. gesture, facial expressions; body movement, etc.	music, background noise, sound effects, etc. laughter; crying; humming; body sounds (breathing; coughing, etc.)
Verbal	street signs, shop signs; written realia (newspapers; letters; headlines; notes, etc.)	dialogues; song lyrics; poems, etc.

(Table 2.1: The polysemiotic nature of audiovisual products, adapted from Chiaro, 2008, p. 143)

This complexity adds to the difficulty of subtitling because although these non-verbal 'codes' do not have direct linguistic equivalents, the subtitler must communicate their purport in the subtitles if they are significant to the plot and message of the film.

2.2 SUBTITLING AND PRAGMATICS

Information communicated between participants in spoken discourse is encoded in linguistic, cultural, interpersonal, and physical norms that are shared by members of the same speech community. These norms, just as they are culture- and/or language-specific, are also situation-specific. In other words, 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 must 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 communication 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 TRANSLATION, SUBTITLING, AND CULTURE

The centrality of culture to the study and practice of translation has been highlighted by many scholars. Bassnett (2005) states that:

> Beyond the notion stressed by the narrowly linguistic approach, that translation involves the transfer of 'meaning' contained in one set of language signs into another set of language signs through competent use of the dictionary and grammar, the process involves a whole set of extra-linguistic criteria…. Language, then, is the heart within the body of culture, and it is the interaction between the two that results in the continuation of life-energy. In the same way that the surgeon, operating on the heart, cannot neglect the body that surrounds it, so the translator treats the text in isolation from the culture at his peril (pp. 22-23).

To the same effect, Venuti (1995) emphasizes that "The viability of a translation is established by its relationship to the cultural and social conditions under which it is produced and read" (p. 18). Early translation theories proved insufficient because of their purely linguistic approaches and negligence of the sociocultural settings in which language operates. Therefore, intercultural competence is crucial to the practice of translation. The translator should not only possess "a bilingual ability but also a bi-cultural vision. Translators mediate between cultures (including ideologies, moral systems and sociocultural structures), seeking to overcome those incompatibilities which stand in the way of transfer of meaning" (Hatim & Mason, 1990, p. 223). Cultural elements have a stronger presence in subtitling because they are depicted in the images and sounds not just the dialog. "An audiovisual text offers a cultural representation of the world, both through language and the image" (Pettit, 2009, p. 44), a fact that places more pressure on the subtitler and urges him/her to pay more attention to this vital component. Diaz Cintas emphasizes that

> The linguistic and cultural approaches should not be viewed as antagonistic paradigms but, rather, complementary. By focusing on our object of study from several angles we can only gain a better knowledge of translation and translating…. The problem only arises when priority is given to one of the two dimensions at the exclusion of the other. The ideal solution comes by integrating both approaches in what Munday (2001: 181–196) calls an inter-discipline (Diaz Cintas, 2004, pp. 31-32).

This is why Diaz Cintas believes that studies which link translation to other disciplines e.g. cultural studies "are highly profitable from the point of view of research and as yet they have not made an appearance in audiovisual translation. I hope, however, that they will form the basis for future papers very soon" (2004, p. 32). The current study is hoped to fill part of this gap in the research by shedding light on some cultural 'bumps' encountered in subtitling Islamic TV shows from Arabic into English.

2.4 THE FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

It is clear that 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 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 translation brief** which 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 ST analysis of 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 need to be adapted to the TT addressee's situation; (3) the translation type decides the translation style (source-culture or target-culture oriented). (4) the problems of the text can then be tackled at a lower linguistic level (as in the ST analysis in the second component above).

Nord introduces 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 three real examples (utterances) and their translations which are taken from three different programs broadcast on Iqraa satellite channel, namely فقه المغتربين (Muslim Expatriates), بدائع الفوائد (Gems of Wisdom) and دعوة للفرح (A Call to Happiness)[1]. These have been obtained by the kind permission of the subtitling manager at Iqraa TV where I have worked for almost 10 years. The sample covers different topics (acts of worship like prayer, 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 related to cultural allusions 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 employed 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. This will also help the researcher to answer the last question of the study.

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[1] These are the names of the programs as translated by Iqraa TV.

3.3 PROCEDURES

1- The three examples are classified under three subcategories: Qur'anic allusions, Sunnah allusions as well as sensitive and controversial issues (e.g. *Jihad*).

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 in 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 an Iqraa more experienced translator/editor observing the technical restrictions and quality standards of the channel, as this table shows:

ST (Dur. 5.5 sec.)	TT-1 (132/ 24 cps)	TT-2 (54/10 cps)
يقول الله عز وجل، بعد أعوذ 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:

4- The ST and the two TTs are then analyzed considering 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 QUR'ANIC ALLUSIONS

These are direct or indirect references to Qur'anic verses, topics or stories that are familiar to Muslims, and which constitute the background of a certain situation described by the speaker. This is a challenge because the target viewers (especially non-Muslims) are unlikely to be familiar with this background information — a challenge that requires special translation strategies and sensitivity in the subtitler's part to contextualize the TT and make it communicative in the TC. The following example is taken from the fifth episode of the series فقه المغتربين which was aired with subtitles under the name *Muslim Expatriates.* The preacher is an Egyptian professor who is explaining the convenience and ease of performing prayer.

ST (Dur. 5.3 sec.)	TT-1 (73/ 13.7 cps)	TT-2 (57/10.7 cps)
مش مطلوب منك تقرا جزء قرآن	You are not necessarily required to recite a whole section of the Qur'an	You aren't required to recite too many verses:
ممكن تصلي بالفاتحة وقل هو الله أحد	You can pray reciting the Opening chapter and just a short chapter like the "Purity of Faith"	The 'Opening' plus a very short sura like 'Sincerity of Faith' will do,

ممكن تصلي بالفاتحة وآية كـ"**مدهامتان**"	or just the Opening Chapter and a verse like **"Both of deepest green"²**.	so will "the Opening" (Al–Fatihah) plus **a one-word verse !**
شوف بأة يعني آية أد أيه؟	This verse can only be a few-letters long	See how easy it is?

(i) The translation brief goes as follows: (1) The intended text functions are informative (describing the ease of worship) and appellative (urging the [Muslim] viewers to perform prayers regularly). This applies to both the ST and TTs. (2) The ST sender is a female preacher known for her gentle preaching and motherly tone, and the receivers are Muslim Arabs who live or work abroad. The TTs' senders are Iqraa subtitlers while their receivers are international Iqraa TV viewers who come from different cultural and religious backgrounds. (3) This series was aired in 2013 over different satellites all over the world. (4) The ST medium is speech while the TT medium is written subtitles (4) whose motive is to explain to Muslims abroad how to perform prayers easily without incurring any hardship.

(ii) The ST is analyzed as follows: (1) The subject matter is Islamic preaching. (2) As to the content, the ST includes references to some Qur'anic chapters like الفاتحة (the Opening Chapter) and قل هو الله أحد/ الإخلاص (Sincerity or Purity of Faith/ Uniqueness of God), as well as verses (مدهامتان) all of which have the connotation of being short, easy and quick to recite. This contributes to the overall message of the episode. These Qur'anic allusions that appear in three utterances function as a cohesive strategy linking them together. (3) Presuppositions about the participants' cultural background include the following: The ST receivers know the names of these chapters and how easy and short they are which may not be the case with TT recipients, especially the reference to the verse "مدهامتان". This requires adding background information in the TT to provide this necessary knowledge for the target viewers to whom the quoted translation of مدهامتان is four words, not just one like in Arabic. This has been achieved by adding background information like "a short chapter", "a few-letters long", "a very short sura" and "a one-word verse." Employing the translation strategy of addition here is necessary to convey the intended meaning implied in the ST. (4) The composition of these utterances is interesting in that the first is a negation of what can be expected to be a difficult requirement of worshippers. This attracts the viewers' attention to the next two utterances which present just the opposite which is the recitation of very short *suras* (Qur'anic chapters). This juxtaposition of what is difficult and not required and what is easy and required is summarized in the last utterance which emphasizes the ease of performing this act of worship. This macrostructure enhances the appellative function of the utterance that encourages the (believing) viewers to be steadfast in prayers.

(5) There are no non-verbal elements except for the image of the speaker whom the target viewers might want to see, especially she is wearing a *hijab* which might be interesting to non-Muslims. Therefore, the TT should be kept as concise as possible. Here, TT-2 is more successful than TT-1 in condensing the message. (6) The names of the Qur'anic chapters belong to Qur'anic register and Islamic terminology which is to be reflected in the TC since this is an educational program. However, the pragmatic connotation of the word مدهامتان should be prioritized over its semantic meaning which is not intended per se. What the preacher means is the shortness and ease of the verses required for prayer to be valid. Moreover, the repetition of the word ممكن denotes that ease as well. (7) Sentence structure contributes to this same message, for the parallelism between the second and third utterances emphasizes her point and creates (8) a persuasive tone which is also assisted by placing the

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² This is M. Abdel-Haleem's translation (2005) of Q 55:64 (Surat Ar-Rahman: 64).

stress on the names of the very short chapters. Therefore, the lexical, syntactic, and suprasegmental features all contribute to the functions and purposes of the subtitles.

(iii) The functional hierarchy of translation problems includes the following points: (1) the type of translation is predominantly documentary for TT-1 and mainly instrumental for TT-2 although both use a mix of both types, but with different degrees. For instance, TT-1 adds "a short chapter like…" in the second subtitle which is an instrumental strategy while TT-2's second and third subtitles include transliterations (*sura* and *Al-Fatihah*, respectively) which are documentary translation strategies. However, TT-1 uses documentary (literal) translation to render the highlighted verse "مدهامتان" while TT-2 employs instrumental (pragmatic) translation. (2) The functional elements adapted to the TT addressee's situation are words like جزء من القرآن which is translated as "section" in TT-1, but it can be ambiguous as it does not have the same communicative purpose of جزء. TT-2 explicates it more by rendering it into "too many verses" which is the intended meaning. Explication is necessary here because جزء does not have an equivalent in the TL. TT-1 is clearer, however, in the second and third subtitles in that it adds the word *chapter* after the names of the *suras* to define what these names are. Additionally, the domesticated word *chapter* is more transparent than the TT-2's *sura* which makes it more communicative for the target readers. However, the very short verse cited by the speaker, i.e. "مدهامتان", is translated literally in TT-1 and pragmatically in TT-2. The literal translation is both longer and unnecessary. It can even confuse the target readers because its literal meaning can distract the viewers from the intended message since they are unlikely to know what "Both of deepest green" refers to, or its relevance to the intended message. On the other hand, TT-2's pragmatic rendering — "a one-word verse" — clearly departs from the literal meaning but 'faithfully' reproduces the intention of the speaker. (3) TT-1 and TT-2 use mixed translation styles; they integrate source-culture and target-culture norms together. (4) Lower-level linguistic problems have been discussed in (ii-6 and 8) as well as (iii-2) above. To make the TT more communicative, the following slight reformulation is suggested: "Recite the Opening Chapter and another short one like 'Sincerity of Faith'/ Or you can recite the Opening Chapter plus a one-word verse" (60/11.3 cps).

4.2 SUNNAH[3] ALLUSIONS

These are allusions to Prophetic sayings or incidents that happened in the Prophet's life. Like Qur'anic allusions, these hints are culture-specific because they are known only to Muslims who share a minimum of background knowledge about the Prophet's life. The ST sender builds on this background when he speaks to Muslims. However, this is a gap in the TC that necessitates explicatory translation strategies to contextualize the TT for the target audience. The following utterance is taken from the first episode of the 2010 Ramadan series دعوة للفرح (A Call to Happiness) where the preacher extols the Prophet's immigration to Medina as the most important event in Islamic history.

ST (Dur. 4.16 sec.)	TT-1 (72/ 17.3 cps)	TT-2 (64/15.3 cps)
من ليلة الغار... تاريخنا يبدأ من **ليلة الغار**	With the Night of the Cave… Our history begins with the **Night of the Cave,**	Our Islamic history begins when **the Prophet immigrated to Medina;**
ماهو 6 آب ولا 12 سبتمبر ولا 25 يوليو، كلام فاضي هذا	not 6th of August or 12th of September or 25th of July. All this is nonsense!	everything else is secondary to this event.

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[3] Sunnah typically means the Prophet's tradition and sayings. However, in this context it refers to the Prophet's life in general.

(i) The translation brief is summarized in the following points: (1) The ST has an expressive function (the preacher's euphoric glorification of the Prophet's immigration) and an informative one (where he states that it marks the start of the Islamic calendar). These two functions are echoed in the TTs. (2) The ST sender is an Iqraa preacher, and his immediate receivers are his congregation in a Saudi mosque although the program was watched by Arab Muslims at home as well. The TT sender is an Iqraa subtitler, while its receivers are global viewers who come from Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds. (3) The program was produced, subtitled, and broadcast in 2010 during the month of Ramadan and was received in the Middle East and globally. (4) The ST medium is spoken while the TT medium is written subtitles, both of which are part of audiovisual material broadcast on satellite TV. (5) The ST motive is to give tips for a happy life for Arab Muslims (in the whole series) through reviving their sense of pride in Islamic history (in this utterance). The TT motive is to transmit that purpose to non-Arab Muslims and to show non-Muslims — who may happen to be watching — a glorious aspect of Islamic history.

(ii) The ST analysis is detailed as follows: (1) The subject matter is religious discourse of Islamic focus. (2) The content is centered around a reference to an epoch-making event in the Prophet's life that changed the course of history, namely his immigration in 622 AD to Medina which became the new cradle of Islam after 13 years of persecution in Mecca. The new home became the first center of Islamic civilization that continued for several centuries to follow. The most crucial point in the immigration was when the Prophet and his companion Abu Bakr As-Siddiq hid in the Cave of Thawr from the Meccans who were chasing them. Because the cave was their safe haven that saved them from a sure death, it became the icon of the immigration journey (known in Arabic as the *Hegira*). A few years after the Prophet's death in 632 AD, the second Caliph, Umar ibn Al-Khattab, chose that night to mark the start of the Islamic calendar to which the preacher in this utterance is alluding, contrasting it with the Gregorian calendar with its months (July, August and September) as TT-1 shows. (3) This background information is shared in the SC, and once the "Night of the Cave" is mentioned, the Arab Muslim audience recalls the whole story. However, for a non-Arab, non-Muslim audience, it is impossible to grasp this reference without having studied Islamic history. Therefore, this part of the subtitle was adapted in TT-2 to communicate the intended meaning to the TRs as (iii-2) below demonstrates. (4) As for the microstructural composition of the utterance, it contains a fragment at the beginning, which is a part of a poem recited by the speaker who then pauses to interpolate the utterance under analysis. This fragment is ignored in TT-2 because it is repeated in the main sentence that follows. At the macrostructural level, being a digression from a poem, the TT should be kept as simple and short as possible in order to minimize the interruption of the flow of the poem while providing the necessary background information for the cultural reference.

(5) Non-verbal elements include the camera shots inside the mosque where the program was filmed. The camera moves from the preacher to the congregation to the walls and ceiling with its beautiful chandelier which could be exciting for non-Muslims to see, especially if they have never been inside a mosque before. Therefore, the TT should be kept as concise as possible to give the viewers the chance to see other visual, non-verbal elements. (6) Lexical problems include ليلة الغار which should not be translated literally due to its cultural specificity. Therefore, it is explicated in the TT-2 to make sense for the TRs, as explained in (iii-2) below. (7) Regarding sentence structure, the utterance contains a fragment and a complete sentence. The first is ignored in TT-2 because it is repeated in the complete sentence which is reformulated and adapted to TRs' needs as explained above. This is because subtitles should always make sense and comply with written conventions even though the spoken ST is fragmented or nonsensical. (8) Suprasegmental features include placing the sentence stress on ليلة الغار as well as the strong, enthusiastic tone of the speaker.

This is adapted by unpacking the cultural allusion of this expression in the overt statement of the Prophet's immigration.

(iii) The functional hierarchy of translation problems is described as follows: (1) TT-2 type of translation is instrumental. Cultural adaptation is maximal in this example: omission, addition, reformulation, euphemization and explication are all employed to make the TT easily comprehensible. (2) This is clear in the adaptation of the following elements: the deletion of the fragment "With the night of the Cave"; the addition of "when the Prophet immigrated to Medina" (which is an explication of the "night of the cave"); the addition of "Islamic" to "Our history" to reflect the speaker's pride; the omission of the Gregorian month names in the second subtitle and the offensive phrase كلام فاضي هذا which is euphemized and modulated to "everything else is secondary to this event." These adaptations are a form of "benevolent intervention" (Pedersen, 2010, p. 74) whose aim is not only to make the TT accessible for the target viewers, but also to make it more polite by hiding the offensive language that seems to scorn elements of their culture (the Gregorian Calendar). (3) The translation style is source-culture oriented in TT-1, but target-culture oriented in TT-2. (4) Lower-level linguistic problems have been tackled in (ii-4, 6, 7, 8 and iii-2) above. Despite the strenuous efforts exerted by the subtitler and the amount of adaptation he made, he could not get rid of the ST's subjective tone completely, for the existence of *Our* in the phrase *Our Islamic history* can turn off some sensitive non-Muslim viewers who might feel excluded. Therefore, I suggest omitting this pronoun to make the translation more neutral and objective, thus: "Islamic history begins with the Prophet's immigration to Medina." (64/15.3 cps).

4.3 SENSITIVE AND CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES (*JIHAD*)

Issues like *Jihad* and women rights in Islam are among the most difficult to handle in subtitling due to the already existing misconceptions about them in the West. Muslim societies are often targeted in some Western media outlets that nurture Islamophobia and depict Muslims as "violent extremists, anti-Semitic and anti-Christian, averse to democracy, oppressive of women, culturally backward, and dedicated to establishing Islamic law around the world" (Shryock, 2010, p. 2). This has led to what Tawfik (2020) calls politicized lexis or politicized translation:

> translators sometimes offer "new" translations of already-existing ones that do not serve certain political purposes. For example, *jihad* has been politicized to serve anti-Islam stance and spread Islamophobia, especially after the 9/11 Attacks. The meaning of *jihad* has been limited to waging a holy war, although the meaning of جهاد in Arabic is more general than this limited, narrow-minded meaning (p. 9).

The sensitivity of such 'politicized' issues pressures the subtitler to be careful when translating them "to an audience that was presumed to include not only well-meaning if misinformed viewers but also, if intermittently, hostile ones" (Moll, 2017, p. 342). The following example is taken from the first episode of the series بدائع الفوائد (*Gems of Wisdom*) where the preacher highlights the centrality of Islam's fundamental doctrine — monotheism. However, he digresses to one of the most sensitive issues that have caused the blatant misconception that Islam was spread at the tip of the sword. The bare mention of *Jihad* recalls terrorism, violence, and bloodshed in the mind of many Westerners. Iqraa subtitles 'struggled' to mitigate this misconception.

ST (Dur. 6.6)	TT-1 (115/ 17.4 cps)	TT-2 (67/10 cps)

ولأجل لا إله إلا الله وُضِعت القِبلة وأُسست الملة **وجُردت سيوف الجهاد**	And for the sake of "there is no God but Allah", The Qiblah (prayer direction) was designated, the religion was established **and the swords of Jihad were unsheathed.**	And for the establishment of pure monotheism God Almighty sent His religion to earth and ordered us **to defend it.**

(i) The translation brief details the following points: (1) The ST functions are informative (explaining the importance of monotheism in Islam), expressive (the preacher uses parallel passive structures and highly formal and literary language to highlight the seriousness of the topic), and appellative (urging the viewers to abide by that doctrine). However, only the informative and appellative functions are retained in TT-2, while TT-1 attempts to reproduce all of them. (2) The ST sender is an Iqraa preacher and the receivers are Arab Muslims who watch this channel. The TT sender is an Iqraa subtitler and his receivers are Western (and other) audiences, both Muslim and non-Muslim. (3) This program was broadcast in 2015 on different satellites all over the world. (4) The ST medium is speech while the TT medium is written subtitles. (5) The ST motive is to educate Muslims by explaining Islam's basic tenets while the TT motive is to reproduce that goal in English and to show non-Muslims the beauty and uniqueness of the Islamic creed.

(ii) The ST analysis includes the following aspects: (1) The subject matter is purely theological. (2) The content revolves around the centrality of believing in one God to Islamic creed, a tenet to which everything else is peripheral. It is the core of worship, belief and practice and should, thus, be defended against any distortion. However, the clause وجُردت سيوف الجهاد together with its literal translation can have negative connotations for some people, especially Islamophobic Westerners who believe that Islam is a dangerous ideology that seeks to spread globally using violence and killing. The mere mention of *swords* does nothing but confirming the orientalist claim that Islam spread at the tip of the sword and that *Jihad* is only an equivalent to holy war. Although the speaker does not state whether these swords were 'unsheathed' in defensive or offensive operations, the TT-2 translator used the former interpretation based on Qur'anic teachings which prevent any compulsion in religion (Q2: 256); ensure freedom of choice to believe or not (Q18: 29); and to fight *back* those who fight Muslims to put an end to oppression (Q22: 39). This is clear in the interpretive rendering in TT-2. (3) Presuppositions about the recipients' cultural background have been explained in (ii-2) above. (4) Microstructurally, the ST utterance is composed of three parallel clauses in the passive voice which is a formal feature used in Arabic to denote the seriousness of the topic. Macrostructurally, this utterance is linked to the preceding and succeeding ones by repeating the phrase, ولأجل لا إله إلا الله , which actually occurs throughout the episode followed by the many aspects of Islamic creed, practice and worship that derive their value from this central doctrine of monotheism. In some instances, this phrase is translated literally i.e., "for the sake of *there is no God but Allah*". However, in others like the one under analysis, its pragmatic meaning (pure monotheism) is introduced as an alternative both to avoid repetition and to make the message clearer. (5) No non-verbal elements are present in this utterance. (6) The ST is replete with religious lexical elements: لا إله إلا الله is the first part of the testimony of faith which is the first pillar of Islam. Because it is culture-specific, it is replaced by a general term in TT-2, namely *monotheism,* a concept also shared with Christianity and Judaism and is thus perceived to be appropriate for the target viewers. Moreover, القبلة, الملة and الجهاد are basically Islamic concepts that need to be adapted to the target culture situation as detailed in (iii-2) below. (7) and (8) The sentence structure is one of the most outstanding linguistic features in this utterance: the three passive clauses being in parallel structures give a sense of definitiveness in the tone of the speaker.

(iii) The functional hierarchy of translation problems is explained as follows: (1) The translation type in TT-1 is documentary, whereas TT-2 employs instrumental translation that involves (2) the adaptation of many functional elements to the TT addressee's situation: First, لأجل لا إله إلا الله has been reformulated as "And for the establishment of pure monotheism" because "monotheism" is a familiar religious term in Christianity and Judaism which are part of the TC. Second, the ST's passive voice (retained in TT-1) has been changed into the active voice in TT-2, which is clearer and more direct, two features that are typical of good subtitling, given the limited presentation time. This, however, has resulted in the loss of the expressive function from the TT-2. Third, TT-2 has been reduced due to the deletion of وضعت القبلة perceived to be of less communicative importance and to comply with the space and time constraints. Fourth, although Hans Wehr (1976, p. 142) and Baalbaki (1995, p. 436) state that جهاد means "**holy way**", "**battle**" and "**fight**", the clause وجُردت سيوف الجهاد has been euphemized and reinterpreted in more favorable terms, i.e. "and ordered us **to defend it**", an interpretation that does not arouse any sensitivities, and at the same time is true to the main teachings of the Qur'an. Although the translator diverges from what the preacher *literally* says, he interprets the utterance considering the Qur'an which, according to Muslims, is the *literal* Word of God as shown in (ii-2) above. This example confirms Moll's description of subtitling practices at Iqraa:

> Fidelity to God could and did at times, however infrequent, demand a betrayal of the preacher being subtitled. For translators, this was a moral imperative, since the original Arabic-language program was in the end, like its subtitles, merely an interpretation of the ultimate source text of divine revelation…. Here the stakes of translation were not just getting it right linguistically or even pragmatically but getting it right by God…. Subtitling in Islamic television thus became at times a site of struggle between competing epistemologies not only of translation and mediation but also of critique. (2017, p. 358).

(3) Therefore, the translation style is target-culture oriented in TT-2. (4) Lower-level linguistic problems have been tackled in (ii-4, 6, 7 and 8) as well as (iii-2) above. Moreover, TT-2 has reduced the text to slightly more than half (67 characters instead of 115), thus achieving a comfortable reading rate of 10 cps which is less than the average standard (13 cps). This means that viewers can read the subtitle comfortably. Thus, TT-2 meets high-quality subtitling standards.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis has uncovered a number of observations. First, different levels of formality are used in the ST, and this is typical of Islamic discourse where the preacher switches between formal and informal registers (the latter is used to explain or comment on the former in some cases). However, informalities are standardized in the TT which follows written conventions. Fragments are also reformulated into full and complete sentences to facilitate comprehension and minimize distraction, given the fleeting nature of subtitles. Second, subtitlers employ a mix of translation strategies, types, and styles in the same subtitle. The aim is to maximize communicativeness and to comply with the space and time restrictions. Third, documentary translation is impractical both for violating the space and time constraints and for its inability to communicate culture-specific references. This necessitates the adoption of instrumental translation with its adaptive and reductive techniques like omission and summarization to condense the message and reformulate it in a way that makes sense in the target culture. Omission is perhaps the most typical strategy used in subtitling not only to abridge the long subtitles, but also to delete offensive language and irrelevant information that can distract the viewers. That is why TT-2s have been found to be more functional and efficient thanks to their more comfortable reading rates and compliance with target culture norms.

5.1 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

1- What is the nature of cultural pitfalls encountered in Islamic subtitling?

The current research has shown three types of cultural challenges, i.e., Qur'anic allusions, Sunnah allusions as well as sensitive and politicized issues. Qur'anic and Sunnah allusions are difficult to render due to their cultural specificity and the technical limitations that prevent the interpolation of the necessary background in many cases. This requires a great deal of creativity and adaptation to convey the intended meaning in few words. Politicized issues like *Jihad* can even be more problematic because they do not only require understanding of the ST and its religious background, but also cultural awareness of the sensitivities these issues raise in the TC. The subtitler finds himself caught between a desire to translate faithfully and a desire to build cultural bridges with the target viewers. Here, the translator plays the role of a cultural mediator.

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

Both Qur'anic and Sunnah allusions require pragmatic translation to communicate the *intended* meaning. In other words, explication is recommended to unpack the specific cultural reference (CSR). Addition or overtranslation can also be useful in providing context which is necessary to understand the CSR in case there is enough time and space. For politicized terms and sensitive issues such as *Jihad*, euphemization through specification proved to be efficient. "Defensive war" is one interpretation of *Jihad,* and it does not arouse the same negative connotations of the borrowed form in English. Furthermore, omission can be employed to remove redundancies and offensive language; to provide comfortable reading rates; and to enable the viewers to enjoy other filmic elements such as images and scenery.

3- To what extent do the technical constraints affect the efficiency of subtitles and translation decisions?

The limited space on the screen compels the subtitler to delete a great part of the ST message from the TT which causes translation loss. This is clear in 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 the subtitles to lose some of their rhetorical power and aesthetic effect. Compensation is recommended through adding some background information, but this is not always possible. That is why creativity is a big asset to close this gap, although it is not inherent in many subtitlers.

4- What are the qualifications of a competent subtitler of Islamic TV programs?

Besides linguistic competence in both the SL and TL, subtitlers of Islamic TV programs need to have cultural sensitivity and understanding of both the SC and TC. They should also have broad Islamic background that can be attained through formal education or extensive reading to understand the connotations of complex and specialized terms. Additionally, creativity is an essential skill that enables the subtitler to reproduce the meaning and effect of the original and minimize semantic, rhetorical and cultural loss given the space limitations on the screen.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the difficulties of handling three cultural areas in Islamic subtitling: Qur'anic and Sunnah allusions as well as politicized issues that have negative connotations in the West. Different translation strategies have been found to suit each challenge, but, generally, adaptation, equivalence and explicitation are effective techniques. Flexibility and creativity are indispensable for the subtitler to maximize communication and

appreciation of the audiovisual material despite the space and time constraints within which subtitles are created. The examples analyzed in this article are not exhaustive; rather, they are aimed to trigger more investigation into other problematic areas in the field.

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