

## **Investigating Strategies of Dubbing Culture-Specific Items in English-Arabic Animated Cartoons**

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### **Abstract**

*In most Arabic-speaking countries, television cartoon channels exclusively broadcast dubbed animated cartoons designed for the Arab audience and children. Dubbing is a habitual mode of audiovisual translation used to translate cartoons, among other audiovisual products, in order to enable the English products to reach a wider foreign audience. For this case study, the researcher has explored dubbing strategies in a popular animated cartoon dubbed from English into Arabic which is daily broadcast on Cartoon Network Arabia, namely “The Amazing World of Gumball”. The data consists of seven English Episodes which are contrasted with their Arabic counterparts to conduct a qualitative analysis of the strategies used to dub culture-specific items (Henceforth CSIs) using Davies (2003) theoretical framework. The model incorporates the following translation strategies for rendering CSIs, namely: Preservation, addition, omission, globalization, localization, transformation and creation. The study results have showcased correlations between the transfer of CSIs and the aforementioned translation strategies. Most significantly, the research has revealed additional shifting strategies spotted in the dubbed corpus. They are basically sociolinguistic strategies that include two types of shifting; specifically, code-switching and language variation. Code-switching is performed by mixing different linguistic codes and alternating between different languages in one dubbed sentence, while language variation essentially involves a shift from Standard Arabic to a colloquial Arabic dialect.*

**Keywords:** *Dubbing, culture-specific items, strategies, cartoons, shifting*

### **1. Introduction**

In the traditional linguistic approach of translation studies, translation is perceived as the transfer of structures and grammatical forms from one language to another. Recently, the transfer from source language (Henceforth SL) to the target language (Henceforth TL) gives prominence to functions and communicative purposes and the assessment requires the

integration of disciplines such as sociolinguistics, pragmatics and culture studies. Therefore, there is a leap from a structural narrow view of translation to a functional view that aims at incorporating new factors for assessing translation such as cultural equivalence, communicative function of the source text (Henceforth ST) and all extra-linguistics factors in the language. According to Gentzler (2001), the important shift in translation theory is a shift including cultural and social factors. In modern functional approach, the cultural attribute is gaining ground and becomes an essential line of assessment of the target culture, which is in accordance with the descriptive target-oriented trend in translation studies. Moreover, House (2009) emphasises the ‘culturally-oriented approaches’ to translation studies and Schäffner (2004) argues in favour of “a more functionally and socioculturally oriented concept of translation”. In both claims, the sociocultural reality of the ST is brought to the fore with a special care about how to transfer cultural items in the target text (Henceforth TT) and how to reach cultural equivalence.

Dubbing cartoons from English into Arabic is one area to which this line of research is applied and the transfer of cultural terms is explored.

## **2. Literature Review**

Each country has its own tradition in choosing the appropriate audiovisual translation mode depending on the product. In the Arab world, films are mainly subtitled while cartoons are often dubbed to facilitate their reception by kids. Dubbing is the oral mode of translation and consists of transferring data from an oral SL to an oral TL. It is the replacement of the original speech with a voice track which attempts to match the lip movements of the original (Baker & Hochel, 2004). This is carried out in specific dubbing studios where actors in the TL read the scripts, then act them out through the process of lip-synchronisation. Generally, the speech in the TL looks genuine by selecting the right actors and matching the appropriate human vocal sounds to the original ones. In dubbing cartoons, specifically, some modifications of the actors’ vocal sounds are needed to meet the requirements of the target audience since cartoons are mainly designed for children. All the phonological features of the original oral speech are reproduced with all their particularities and prosodic features so that the dubbed voices usually come out to the young viewers in a funny way since the audiovisual product aims to be primarily entertaining for kids. Translators endeavour to create an equivalent dubbed version not only at the phonological level but also at the linguistic and the cultural levels.

It has been argued that equivalence at different levels between ST and TT is a priority in translation tasks and dubbing (Zabalbeascoa, 1997). Cultural equivalence is a major concern in translation studies and the translator, be it a dubber, a subtitler or an interpreter strives to transfer successfully the cultural concepts and the socio-cultural reality and norms of the ST to the TT. The transfer is not about mere linguistic items but also concerns social conventions, lifestyle, and mindset of speakers in a given community. But when it comes to translating these distinctive cultural concepts to another language with disparate speakers who have their own cultural references, then equivalence grows challenging. Sometimes equivalence is impossible for some cultural items are untranslatable when they make sense only in the SL and could be meaningless and/or inexistent in the TL. To overcome cultural differences and reach cultural equivalence, translation scholars argued in favour of many alternatives like ‘deliberate compensations’ (Mailhac, 2000) or pragmatic modifications conditioned by cultural differences (Sager, 1989).

Regarding culture-specific items, Newmark (1988) refers to them as ‘cultural words’ that are part of the following fields: Ecology, material culture, social culture, Organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts, gestures and habits. Baker (1992) has identified them as ‘culture specific concepts’ that can be abstract or concrete, related to a religious belief, a social custom or food. Pedersen (2005) contended that there are intralinguistic culture-bound references like idioms, proverbs, slang and dialects. Pavlovic and Poslek (2003) designed a more inclusive and explanatory typology based on Newmark and Baker’s classifications. They have incorporated ecology, everyday life, material culture, history, religion, economy, political and administrative functions and institutions, the armed forces, education, forms of address, gestures and habits, work, leisure and entertainment.

For the purpose of this research, CSIs will be investigated following Pavlovic and Poslek typology along with Pedersen’s suggested intralinguistic culture-bound references. They both give an ample choice of culture-specific terms to carry out the research.

### **3. Methodology**

A contrastive case study will be conducted on a bilingual, parallel, unidirectional corpora using a qualitative descriptive interpretative research method. Some English episodes from a popular cartoon “the Amazing World of Gumball” are selected for this case study and contrasted with their counterparts in Arabic. The data is extracted from Cartoon Channel available online on YouTube. The episodes are entitled as follows:

- The treasure

- Halloween
- The knight
- The robot
- The wand
- The moustache
- The fridge

Two research questions were set up to explore the transfer of CSIs; namely (1) How are CSIs correlated with Davies' translation strategies, and (2) Are there any other dubbing strategies spotted in the corpus?

The research aims to evaluate the transfer of CSIs from English into Arabic, raise awareness about how CSIs are transferred and sensitize the Arabic audience to cultural translation problems.

The theoretical framework adopted for this case study consists of Davies' Model (2003, p. 65) which includes seven strategies for rendering CSIs:

- 1) Preservation
- 2) Addition
- 3) Omission
- 4) Globalization
- 5) Localization
- 6) Transformation
- 7) Creation

Preservation is when translators "decide to maintain the source text term in the translation." The ST term is transferred without any changes or is changed phonologically. Addition occurs when a CSI of the ST is transferred into the TT but explanatory information is also provided. Omission is deleting the "omission of a problematic CSI." Regarding globalization, Davies (2003) describes this strategy as the replacement of the ST culture-specific references with "more neutral or general". Localization is the replacement of the original culture-specific references with ones that are more familiar to the target readers. Transformation is to modify a CSI and that means "alteration or distortion of the original". Creation is when the translator creates a CSI which is not present in the ST.

This model will be used to explore the different correlations between the dubbing strategies and the CSIs collected from the cartoon.

#### 4. Data analysis and results

The table below showcases correlations between the dubbed strategies and the Arabic utterances.

English utterances	Dubbed utterances	Translation Strategies	Type of the CSI
1) Mexican wrestler	المصارعة الحرة	Localization	Leisure and entertainment
2) Burger bun	خبز عادي	Globalization	food
3) Fifth amendment	قانون الكبر المدني	Addition	Political and administrative functions and institutions
4) Sandwich bagel	ساندويتش بايقل	Preservation	Food
5) Relax dude	∅	Omission	Form of address
6) Dear Robot dork	يا آلي النحس	Transformation	Slang
7) Trick or treat	حلاوة ولا شقاوة	Creation	Social custom/habit

**Table 1: English CSIs and their Arabic equivalents**

In *example 1*, Darwin and Gumball were frightened and thought that they are attacked by a stranger. Anais said “guys it’s me your sister” and Gumball replied “you look like a Mexican wrestler”. The last utterance was dubbed as “تشبهين أبطال المصارعة الحرة” using the localization strategy. The Mexican wrestling sport, also known as Lucha libre and popular in Mexico and other Latin American cities, is performed with masqueraded candidates wearing special outfits. The term has been dubbed by employing a more familiar item to the Arab viewer and replaced with a popular kind of wrestling in the Arab world that is the ‘المصارعة الحرة’ backtranslated as free wrestling.

In *example 2*, Anais the sister of Gumball, talks about the burger bun to refer to a special white bread roll with which a hamburger is made. In the dubbed version, the food cultural term is transferred using a globalized term ‘خبز عادي’ which means regular bread. The term ‘خبز’, backtranslated as ‘bread’, is a general umbrella term in Arabic that covers all kinds of

bread. The burger bun is specific in English and related to a foreign American culture where the hamburger meal is very popular for kids and adults.

In *example 3*, « the fifth amendment » which is a culture-bound term related to political and administrative functions and institutions, is dubbed as ‘قانون الكبر المدني’ through the addition strategy since the term has been expanded and explained to the viewers.

Regarding *example 4*, the food terms, “bagel and sandwich” have been translated as ‘ساندويتش’ and ‘بايقل’ respectively. These food items have been preserved in Arabic by pronouncing them in the same way as they are uttered in the English language.

In *example 5*, the form of address « dude » has been omitted in the dubbed version. This might be due to some technical constraints as the speech in the Arabic cartoon has to match the lip movements within a specific span of time.

In *example 6*, the slang expression ‘dear robot dork’ was dubbed into ‘يا آلي النحس’ using the transformation strategy. The negative sexual connotation existent in the swearing English utterance was altered in the TL with a euphemistic cursing that is devoid of any sexual connotations, yet offensive and loaded with other Arabic denotations. Indeed, the calling names ‘النحس’ denotes bad luck and is closely related to the Arabic culture where some people, animals or objects are believed to bring bad luck.

In *example 7*, kids are celebrating Halloween. During this social traditional occasion the two kids are knocking at a door saying ‘trick or treat’ to get some candies from people. The dubber has been creative by translating the utterance using a phrase in Arabic that has prosodic features like rhythm and rhyme and still faithful to the meaning of the SL.

The above qualitative analysis clearly demonstrates that there is a correlation between Davies’ translation strategies and CSIs in the context of dubbing cartoons. Other strategies, apart from Davies’, were also used in the corpus to transfer data namely, sociolinguistic shifting strategies. They are twofold: language variation and code switching.

#### **4.1 Language variation**

The chart below displays language variation when dubbing the aforementioned episodes.

<b>Language variation</b>	<b>Back translation</b>
وقف عندك	Stop there
غامبول	Gumball
خير	What ?
طيب تعال شوف	Ok, come have a look

حظك في زهرك	
باي غامبول سارك في المساء قشطة	Bye gumball See you in the evening sweetie
ارجوك طيب طيب	Please Ok ok
أعطني برقري العب غيرها	Give me my burger

**Table 2: Language variation in the SL**

Language variation is an intralinguistic shifting strategy that occurs within the Arabic language. The strategy clearly denotes a shift from the standard Arabic language to the colloquial Egyptian dialect.

#### 4.2 Code switching

The following dubbed Arabic utterances showcase an interlingual code switching in their construction by combining more than one linguistic code in one sentence. Essentially, utterances are made by combining English and Arabic in one sentence.

Code switching	Back Translation
hey , email انظر عندك الف داروين , اهلا داروين hi , داروين	See, you have a thousand email, Hey Darwin, hi darwin,
inbox عندك صرصار في ال	You have an incroacher in your inbox
?game تذكرت ال ...sorry dude سأحضرها غدا هذا وعد شوف sorry sorry جدا	Did you remember the game ?- Sorry dude... - I'll bring it tomorrow ... - I promise,..I'm awfully sorry - for that
هذا جزاك غامبول please فهمت Ok Ok أخرجني	-This is what you deserve Gumball Ok, ok got it...please get me out of here.
سأعطيها أوامر sorry أنا لا اتلقى	Sorry, I don't get any commands

**Table 3: Code switching in the TL**

The sociolinguistic shifting strategies are used as dubbing strategies that could or could not be understood by kids in the target culture. This depends on the use of language varieties in every country. Monolingual children and children whose second language is not English are less likely to receive the dubbed output with the code-switching strategy properly. The same goes for the Egyptian dialect infiltrated in the dubbed version that would not be decoded by kids other than Egyptians.

**5. Discussion**

Thawabteh (2011) argued that Arabic and English are cases of languages with little cultural affinity and looking for cultural equivalence is not an easy task. In a similar vein, Baker (1992, p. 21) confirmed that the SL cultural word can be totally unknown in the TL and “notoriously difficult to translate into other languages”, which explains the use of ‘safer’ strategies like globalization and addition to make the cultural concept closer to the mind of the receiver in the TL. Slang words are usually dropped from the TT, while the untranslatability of some CSIs makes the dubber resort to the preservation strategy which is the easiest and safest way to transfer untranslatable items by transcribing them in Arabic. Creation, however, remains the brightest side of dubbing and its saving face since it overcomes challenges in cultural translation by replacing cultural items with acceptable creative ones in the TL. In general, translation scholars tried to establish some alternatives to redeem the untranslatability issue and reach cultural equivalence such as ‘deliberate compensations’ (Mailhac, 2000), ‘cultural substitution’ (Chesterman, 1997), ‘cultural filtering’ (House, 1981), domestication (Venuti, 1995).

Code switching and language variation in dubbing are other sociolinguistic strategies spotted in the corpus. The successful reception and understanding of code switched sentences and language varieties largely depend on the receivers’ linguistic background. The problem is that code switching is unintelligible to monolingual Arab children whose second language is not English or who haven’t learned English yet, and thus may cause lexical ambiguity and confusion.

**5. Conclusion**

Some translation strategies, such as transformation, can distort the meaning of CSIs in the TL while the other translation strategies can make the CSIs more or less intelligible to the TL viewers. Sociolinguistic shifting strategies, however, are less helpful and more confusing to the TT. The target audience should be the major focus in dubbing to select effective strategies



to transfer cultural terms and the appropriate language variety. Standard Arabic should be the only linguistic variety used in dubbing cartoons from English into Arabic to address young audience and ensure a safer transfer into the target language.

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