

## SUBTITLING IN THE CONTEXT OF TECHNOLOGY: TRANSLATING CULTURAL ELEMENTS IN *THE SIMPSONS* SERIES INTO ARABIC

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**Abstract:** *This article investigates how culture-bound terms in The Simpsons series, season 27, are translated from English into Arabic. The study mainly focuses on the types of culture-bound terms and the subtitling strategies used to translate these terms. Moreover, this research addresses the effectiveness of translation strategies in conveying Arab cultural values, norms, and Islamic practices to Arabic-speaking audiences. The investigation, grounded in two theories, namely, Newmark's taxonomy for culture-bound types and Gottlieb's taxonomy of subtitling strategies, used a descriptive approach to analyze a dataset of 150 culture-bound terms. The findings show that The Simpsons series includes a variety of religious material, social and metaphorical terms as well as terms of address. Data analysis revealed that subtitling strategies, including transfer, expansion, dislocation, deletion, and imitation, have been extensively employed in conveying culture-bound terms to Arabic-speaking audiences. These strategies were effective in conveying Arab cultural values, norms, and Islamic practices by deleting and toning-down words that might contradict Arabic Islamic values and culture. The study aims to enhance our understanding of how subtitling strategies can be leveraged to preserve elements of Arabic Islamic values and culture.*

**Keywords:** *Translation, subtitling, animated series, The Simpsons season 27, culture-bound terms*

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## Introduction

Translation is an effective means of conveying linguistic and cultural nuances from one language to another. In addition, it helps to transform ideas from one language to another. During the translation process, the translator should consider the writer's style and the intended meaning of the original text (Al-Zgoul & Al-Salman, 2022; Rothwell et al., 2023). Audiovisual translation (AVT) is considered one of the most flourishing translation fields because of its rapid technological advancement and effect on distribution and media production (Mudawe, 2023; Hakami, 2024). This involves localizing the content of audiovisual media in various linguistic transfer practices (Bolaños-García-Escribano & Díaz-Cintas, 2019). It encompasses various practices, including dubbing, subtitling, revoicing, and startling (Chaume, 2020). Our study focuses on subtitling, which is defined as the texts that emerge on the screen (Abdelaal, 2019; Messerli, 2019; Perez, 2022; Djoudi & Toubakh, 2022; Mudawe, 2023). Subtitling has limitations that are confined to space and time constraints (Karakanta et al., 2021; Chen, 2024). Altogether, these constraints complicate the subtitling process for subtitlers, particularly the Arab ones (Nassif, 2021; Eljazouli & Azmi, 2024; Alanazi, 2024).

While subtitling, translators encounter lexical, syntactic, pragmatic, and cultural challenges that hinder the subtitling process (Amanzhol, 2023). In this study, we mainly focused on culture-bound words. According to Djoudi and Toubakh (2022), culture-bound words are considered culture-specific; thus, translating them is one of the major challenges translators in general, and Arabic translators in particular face. In subtitling English movies, Arab subtitlers face a dilemma in toning down sensitive and culture-bound terms in a manner that mitigates the effect of these terms to Arab viewers and in a way that fosters Arab cultural values, norms, and religious practices (Khuddru, 2000; Rejeibi, 2023). Therefore, Arab subtitlers use a variety of subtitling strategies, including omission and adaptation, to address religious and cultural issues in subtitling from English to Arabic (Alkadi, 2010; Al Tamimi & Mansy, 2023).

Our study explores the types of culture-bound terms and subtitling strategies employed in subtitling religious and cultural terms in *The Simpsons* series, which is an animated series created by cartoonist Matt Groening. It revolves around American families and their daily experience. It offers a satirical take of the middle-class American mode of life. We are further concerned with the effectiveness of subtitling strategies in conveying Arab cultural values, norms, and Islamic practices. The translation of culture-bound expressions constitutes a challenge for translators who are required to be bicultural and bilingual (Djoudi & Toubakh, 2022). Within this context, Aixela (1996) pointed out that culture-specific items are challenging because transferring them leads to a translation problem resulting from the absence of equivalent elements in the target culture.

Moreover, Al-Khalafat and Haider (2022) highlight that conveying culture-bound expressions is a daunting task that requires complicated decisions that provoke translators to use various subtitling strategies. In addition, Mudawe (2023) stressed the difficulty of translating culture-bound terms, particularly among translators who are not familiar with the Western culture.

In this study, translating cultural values, norms, and Islamic practices in subtitling *The Simpsons* series from English into Arabic is fraught with challenges because of religious and cultural sensitivities. To handle these challenges, subtitlers need to navigate divergent social norms, comedic conventions, and satirical cues embedded in the series. The hurdles lie in ensuring language precision and modifying the translation to conform to cultural norms and Islamic customs. The following research questions were the focus of this study:

RQ1. What are the types of culture-bound terms in *The Simpsons* series?

RQ2. What are the subtitling strategies used in subtitling the culture-bound and religious terms in *The Simpsons* series while translating from English to Arabic?

RQ3. How do these strategies contribute to preserving Arab cultural values, norms and Islamic practices?

The present study contributes to the existing knowledge on culture-bound terms and the subtitling strategies used when translating *The Simpsons* series into the Arabic language. To ensure conceptual precision, culture-bound terms are consistently used in the study as the central category of the analysis. Related notions such as religious or social expressions are treated as subtypes in this scheme, to ensure terminological coherence throughout the analysis. Theoretically, this article is relevant to audiovisual translation (AVT) in that it demonstrates how subtitlers deal with cultural peculiarities and negotiate meaning across the linguistic borders. In practice, it provides translators with subtitling strategies, which contribute to producing culture-specific terms that are understandable and culturally acceptable to the Arabic audience. This article also points to the importance of subtitling strategies in the preservation of cultural identity in cross-cultural media translation. The current research uses the terms culture-bound as the umbrella term and religious, social, material, metaphorical, and address expressions as its subunits in the framework of Newmark (1988) to ensure the conceptual uniformity of the study. Similarly, the analysis is specifically focused on the strategies of subtitling as the data are based on limited audiovisual content as opposed to translation in general.

## Literature Review

### *Culture-bound Terms*

Several studies (Aixela, 1996; Chiaro, 2009; Pedersen, 2011) define culture-specific items as lexical items with cultural references that can be in the form of fixed expressions, proverbs, and collocations that are inherited in a particular culture.

Regarding the types of culture-bound terms, Espindola (2015) indicates that these terms are classified into 12 categories: (1) religious celebration, (2) dialect, (3) food and drink, (4) scholastic reference, (5) measuring system, (6) means of transportation, (7) forms of entertainment, (8) local institutions, (9) local systems, (10) anthroponyms, (11) toponyms, and (12) fictional characters.

In subtitling, culture-bound terms are pervasive (Akalai, 2024). These terms can be verbal or non-verbal; the verbal ones are manifested in the dialogue and speech of the actors in the film, series, program, etc., while the non-verbal ones are exemplified in street signs, cultural practices, and images pertaining to the source culture (Chiaro, 2009).

Subtitling culture-specific words to Arabic-speaking audiences entails complying with moral standards and adhering to the norms of Arabic culture (Haider & Hussein, 2022). Therefore, translators opt for fine-tuning or omitting vulgar sexual words, insulting expressions, profanities, and obscene words to preserve Arabic viewers' sense of decency (Abu-Rayyash et al., 2023). Moreover, subtitling these words requires the subtitler to be aware of the functions of the culture-bound expressions they carry in the source text to guarantee effective rendering of these expressions to the target language audience (Al-Zgoul & Al-Salman, 2022).

To handle the culture-bound and religious terms that emerge in film subtitling, the translator uses a variety of subtitling strategies to improve the quality of subtitling (Abdelaal, 2019). These strategies are direct translation, cultural substitution, and retention. Rahmani (2024) shows that direct translation is used to transfer religious terms that constitute a part of the media, culture, and art by maintaining a balance between the source and target texts and providing clear and unambiguous meaning. She adds that cultural substitution occurs by transferring religious culture-specific items and adapting them to fit the Arab culture. Retention refers to the transfer of religious cultural terms to convey a similar foreign impact on the target viewers.

### **Language in the Context of Technology**

Language is a structured system of communication that enables humans to convey their ideas, thoughts, and feelings (Fowler, 2022). Language contains

written symbols, signed symbols, or spoken language, which follow conventions and rules to render meaning (Nystrand, 2023). It serves as a critical instrument for knowledge transmission, social connections, interaction, and cultural preservation (Tektigul et al., 2023).

Language and technology have been developing over time, creating and reflecting human culture since ancient times (Atkinson et al., 2025). However, in the modern era, technological mediation of language has been more widespread, with digital tools becoming key means of communication (Han, 2024). The accelerated technological advancement has resulted in text messaging, social media, and AI-driven communication tools that create new linguistic phrases (Alafnan, 2025). These inventions constantly transform language patterns and affect human social behavior, thoughts, and cultural practices (Tianying & Bogoyavlenskaya, 2023).

Technology integration in language use has led to complete linguistic shifts that produce digital dialects combined with online slang, together with code-switching across different platforms (Rohmana & Salsabil, 2024). Language models powered by artificial intelligence and machine translation systems have transformed multilingual communication but have raised moral issues about translation precision as well as possible human data security threats (Mohamed et al., 2024). Natural language processing (NLP), together with voice recognition software, has transformed human-device interactions by creating user-friendly methods for managing technological communication (Sumaiya et al., 2022).

The integration of language science and technology has fundamentally transformed audiovisual translation (AVT) and its adaptation of diverse media for linguistically distinct audiences (Granell & Chaume, 2023). Audiovisual translation has become more efficient and diverse owing to digital media and streaming platforms as well as AI-driven translation tools that enable subtitling, dubbing, and voice-over while providing audio descriptions for global audiences (Haris, 2024). In our study, we investigated the interplay between language, culture, and technology in the translation of *The Simpsons* series from English into Arabic.

### ***Review of Recent Studies on Subtitling Culture-bound Terms***

Several studies have investigated the subtitling of culture-bound terms from English to Arabic. Abdelaal (2019) examined the subtitling strategies used in subtitling *The American Pie* movie for Arabic-speaking audiences, focusing mainly on the subtitling strategies of culture-bound terms. The study adopted the typology of Pedersen (2005, 2011) and the quality assessment model by Pedersen (2017). The study found that subtitlers used a variety of subtitling strategies, including retention to convey nouns, euphemistic expressions, omissions, specifications, explication, generalization, and direct translation.

Similarly, Djoudi and Toubakh (2022) conducted a study on subtitling culture-bound terms in *The Simpsons* series from English to Arabic. The corpus contains the first 30 episodes of *The Simpsons* series. This study employed the Aixela's (1996) model of subtitling strategies and Newmark's (1988) framework of culture-bound terms. The study's findings revealed that six subtitling strategies were employed: transference, zero translation, direct copy, pun-to-pun, non-pun, and pun-to-pound. Interestingly, the study found that the subtitler encountered a variety of challenges in subtitling culture-bound terms, including food and clothing differences, religious references, ideological and cultural aspects, and temporal and spatial dimensions such as the maximum number of lines, their positions on the screen, and synchronization. The study concluded that the translation of culture-specific terms could be improved to enhance translation quality.

Sahari (2021) conducted a study on subtitling sensitive and cultural words in Hollywood films, from English to Arabic. The study showed that taboo words are pervasive in these movies, where they are produced in liberal and open contexts, posing a significant challenge for Arab subtitlers. The study attributed this challenge to Arabic cultural values and norms and to the conservativeness of Arabic society. The data comprised 90 Hollywood movies released between 2000 and 2018. The study employed Toury's (1995) descriptive translation theory and subtitling strategies of domestication and foreignization. The findings of this study revealed that Arab culture has a significant impact on subtitling culture-bound terms and taboo words to Arabic-speaking audiences. On the other hand, Subrata and Jumanto (2023) investigated the subtitling strategies in an animated movie *Coco*. The study used Newmark's (1988) cultural words and Gottlieb's (1992) theory of subtitling strategies. The data consisted of 100 culture-bound terms. The findings of the study showed that these terms can fall within the fields of ecology, material culture, social culture, gesture and habit, and organization.

Our study resembles Djoudi and Toubakh's (2022) and Sahari's (2021) studies in terms of investigating culture-bound types and subtitling strategies in translating culture-bound terms; however, it differs from their studies in that it investigates the subtitling strategies used by translators in addressing religious and cultural issues. In addition, Abdelaal (2019) employed Pedersen's (2005, 2011, 2017) quality assessment model. While the studies conducted by Djoudi and Toubakh (2022) and Subrata and Jumanto (2023) employed Newmark's (1988) theoretical framework, Sahari (2021) used Toury's (1995) descriptive translation theory. Our study employed Newmark's (1988) framework to classify culture-bound terms in *The Simpsons* series. Our study is similar to Subrata and Jumanto's (2023) and Djoudi and Toubakh's (2022) studies employing Gottlieb's (1992) theory of subtitling strategies and Newmark's framework of culture-bound terms.

Although Djoudi and Toubakh (2022) examined the strategies employed while translating culture-bound terms in *The Simpsons* series, research on identifying new strategies used to translate culture-bound terms in *The Simpsons* series remains rare. Our study addresses this gap by investigating new strategies employed in the translation of culture-bound terms in *The Simpsons* series. Our study enhances existing scholarship on translating culture-bound terms, filling a significant void in the literature on translation practices in the Arab world.

## Method

### *Research Design*

This research followed a qualitative descriptive design to give an explanation of the translation of culture-specific terms in *The Simpsons* series. The categorization of the culture-bound terms, as pointed out by Newmark (1988), and the outline of the subtitling strategies as presented by Gottlieb (1992), provided an organized way of recognizing and understanding the subtitling strategies. We employed qualitative analysis according to the categorization of Newmark (1988) of culture-bound words and Gottlieb (1992) of subtitling strategies. Since the dataset is audiovisual and limited in space and time, the analysis focused on subtitling strategies in particular, as opposed to translation processes at large. Digital content analysis was also used since the episodes and subtitles are digital audiovisual data, which required a systematic frame-in-frame review.

### *Corpus of the Study*

*The Simpsons* series was chosen due to its abundance of cultural references, which correspond to the objectives of this study. Purposive sampling was utilized to find the cases with significant culture-bound information related to the research questions (Campbell et al., 2020; Patton, 2002). The English version of the series and its Arabic subtitles were analyzed to produce a total of 150 culture-bound terms. These words were subsequently coded in five categories based on Newmark's (1988) classification of culture-bound terms and put into analysis using Gottlieb's (1992) framework of subtitling strategies.

### *Data Collection*

The data was composed of *The Simpsons* animated series and its Arabic subtitles. The episodes have been downloaded and watched on several occasions to maintain precision and contextualization. A comprehensive record was kept to encode every case of culture-bound expression along with situational context. The analysis was aimed at defining the nature of culture-restricted expression and the subtitling approaches used in translating these expressions to Arabic. A

subsequent evaluation of the effectiveness of these approaches was effective in imparting similar cultural significance to Arabic speakers.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

The study meticulously adhered to ethical considerations despite the public accessibility of *The Simpsons* series on YouTube. It complies with ethical standards for digital content analysis, ensuring respect for Western and Arab cultures, while valuing the academic significance of analyzing public discourse. In addition to employing descriptive and qualitative methods, the study used digital content analysis as a systemic analysis method to study the audiovisual content in the episodes of *The Simpsons* that can also be found online, the English dialogues and their corresponding Arabic subtitles as digital textual data.

### ***Data Analysis***

To analyze the culture-bound terms in *The Simpsons* series, the study adopted translation frameworks that helped achieve the objectives of the study and answer the research questions. In presenting the analyzed data, it is not feasible to include all 150 culture-bound expressions in full due to word limit constraints. Therefore, we have selected the expressions that provide the most clarity in illustrating the identified subtitling strategies and supporting our arguments.

### ***Types of Culture-Bound Terms Based on Newmark's (1988) Framework***

To answer the first research question regarding the types of culture-bound terms in *The Simpsons* series, we employed the integrated approach of Newmark's (1988) taxonomy of culture-bound terms, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Culture-bound Types*

<b>Culture-Bound types</b>	<b>Definitions</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>1) Material expressions</b>	They refer to materialistic issues like food, clothes, buildings.	The word “غامش” [ <i>shemagh</i> ] in Arabic is used to represent ‘ <i>keffiyeh</i> ’ in English, which stands for traditional Arab headscarf.
<b>2) Social expressions</b>	They are defined as expressions used by people on a particular social occasion to render a particular feeling.	The word “آيب” [ <i>Ayb</i> ] in Arabic is used to represent “disgrace” or ‘ <i>shame</i> ’ in English.

Culture-Bound types	Definitions	Examples
3) Religious expressions	They are defined as words that imply religious figures or symbols.	The utterance“ روبرم حجح, [Hajj Mabroor] in Arabic into ‘an accepted pilgrimage’ in English.
4) Terms of address	They are phrases or words employed to refer or address someone in a conversation to reflect their role in society, social status, or their relationship.	The word „حاجح, [Hagg] in Arabic is used to represent [Hajj] in English, which is honorific title that is used either for a person who completed a pilgrimage to Mecca or to denote respect or acknowledgment for a person.
5) Similes and metaphorical expressions	Similes are defined as figures of speech used to resemble unlike things using ‘as’ or ‘like’, while metaphors are used to resemble unlike things without using ‘as’ or ‘like’.	<b>Simile:</b> Source text (English): “He is brave as a lion.” → Arabic translation: «دسأل اك عاجش» [Shujaa' kal-asad]. <b>Metaphor:</b> Source text (English): “Does my marriage have to be something you can smell?” → Arabic translation: «نأ ي جاوز ل ه. نأ ي مش نأ ن ك م ي ء ي ش ن و ك ي» [Episode 1, 5:04].

(Source: Newmark, 1988, p. 103)

We selected this framework for its comprehensiveness and wide use in translation studies. This framework further provides a variety of culture-bound terms that might be encountered in subtitling cultural nuances from English to Arabic in *The Simpsons* series.

Data analysis revealed a discrepancy in the prevalence of culture-bound expressions used in *The Simpsons series, season 27*. The predominant culture-bound expressions identified were religious, comprising around 36 % of the dataset. Material expressions are less frequently found in *The Simpsons series, season 27*, compared to religious ones. They represented around 25 % of the sample. Moreover, data analysis indicated that the use of social expressions constituted 19 % of the recurrence rate, whereas metaphorical phrases included 12 %. The repetition rate of the terms of address was consistent at 8 %.

### ***Subtitling Strategies-Framework of Culture-bound Terms***

To answer the second research question regarding the subtitling strategies used to translate culture-bound terms, we employed Gottlieb’s (1992) taxonomy of subtitling strategies. The rationale behind adopting this framework is its comprehensiveness and widespread use in subtitling studies. This taxonomy consists of ten strategies, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Subtitling Strategies by Gottlieb (1992)**

<b>Subtitling Strategies</b>	<b>Definitions</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>1. Expansion</b>	It means expanding the translation of the source text to the target language readers to guarantee their comprehension.	' <i>He is as sly as a fox</i> ' in English into «بلعث لاك ركام هنا» in Arabic (literally: "He is as cunning as a fox.")
<b>2. Paraphrase</b>	It means reformulating and reconstructing the syntactical nuances of the source text to the target language readers while maintaining the semantic meaning.	' <i>Dogged the bullet</i> ' in English into «لكاشملا بنجت» in Arabic (literally: "He avoided the problems.")
<b>3. Transfer</b>	It means translating the source text to the target language readers correctly and completely.	' <i>She resembles the flower</i> ' in English into «قبشت اهنا» «قدرولا» in Arabic (literally: "She resembles a rose.")
<b>4. Imitation</b>	It means imitating the translation of the source text utterance to the target language readers. The translation of proper nouns like places, countries, and names as well as product brands.	' <i>London</i> ' in English was translated into «ندنل» in Arabic (London)
<b>5. Transcription</b>	It means conveying the irregularities of the source text to the target text.	' <i>Bonjour</i> ' in French into «روجنب» in Arabic ('Good morning' in English)
<b>6. Dislocation</b>	It means faithfully rendering the translation that has a special effect in the target text. It entails preserving the same impact of the source text, particularly when it is essential and affects the meaning.	' <i>ooh</i> ' in English into «ووا» in Arabic (literally: "Ooh")
<b>7. Condensation</b>	As the name suggests, it means condensing i.e. shortening the source text without changing its meaning.	' <i>I am going to the library to buy some books</i> ' in English into «قبتكمل اىل بهذاس» in Arabic (literally: "I will go to the library.")

Subtitling Strategies	Definitions	Examples
8. Decimation	It is regarded as another aspect of condensation, which entails deleting the essential elements of the source text due to discourse speed issues.	' <i>I cannot believe that you did this to me, we have been together for 5 years, how can you do this to me!</i> ' in English into « <i>ثدح ام قدصأ ال</i> » in Arabic (literally: "I do not believe what happened!")
9. Deletion	It entails omitting some phrases or utterances from the source text.	' <i>Well, you know, I was, uh, thinking about it</i> ' in English into « <i>رملأ ي ف ركفا تنك</i> » in Arabic (literally: "I was thinking about it.")
10. Resignation	It occurs when the subtitler provides no translation leading to translation loss.	' <i>Let's go</i> ' in English is not translated in Arabic.

(Source: Gottlieb, 1992)

After identifying the typologies of culture-bound terms considering Newmark's (1988) taxonomy, we identified the strategies used to subtitle the culture-bound terms from English to Arabic. We then thoroughly investigated the subtitling strategies used by translators that addressed religious and cultural issues. We highlighted the decisions made by subtitlers, which contributed to preserving Arab cultural values, norms, and Islamic practices while subtitling *The Simpsons* series into Arabic. This step helped us answer the third research question.

## Findings and Discussion

The findings indicate that *The Simpsons* series encompasses a range of religious, material, social, and metaphorical expressions, along with address expressions. The data analysis showed extensive use of subtitling strategies, such as transfer, expansion, dislocation, deletion, and imitation to communicate culture-bound terms to an Arabic-speaking audience. These strategies effectively communicated Arab cultural values, norms, and Islamic practices by omitting or moderating terms that could conflict with Islamic Arabic values and cultures.

### *Religious Expressions*

This study found that 'religious expressions' were the most used culture-bound expressions in *The Simpsons* series. The highest percentage of the 150 identified items was religious expressions, making them the most common category of the dataset. Example (1), which states '*Angel investors*' into «*رتسفنآ لجنآ*» (Episode 10, 18:30) occurred in a context when investors chased Lize to buy shares from her own created application. This expression in Example (1) has religious

connotations because it metaphorically portrays “angels” as benevolent figures who provide financial support, which resembles how angels offer assistance and guidance in religious contexts. To render this religious expression, the translator uses imitation. The translator imitated the phonological aspects of the source text to the viewers’ target language, leading to a source language-oriented translation (Gottlieb, 1992). Similarly, Abdelaal’s (2019) findings showed the frequent use of imitation in subtitling. Although imitation preserves the original phonetic structure, it fails to effectively render cultural and religious significance to Arabic-speaking audience members. It is possible that the subtitler employed imitation because of the lack of an equivalent counterpart of this translation in Arabic. However, we argue that using culturally adaptive subtitling aligns with Arab cultural norms and values and guarantees that the term “*angels*” resonates with the viewers’ understanding of religious terms.

Example (2) reveals how subtitlers converted swear and offensive words into religious words such as the translation of “*Damn, that is a beautiful sunset!*” into “*يا لهلا اي*” (*Ya Ilahi, dhalika ghuroob shams jameel* – literally “Oh my God, that is a beautiful sunset!”) [Episode 6, 17:07]. This example was said by Homer’s friend, while he asked him to join him and his daughter to go to the island as he saw the sunset. In this example, the word “*damn*” is considered a mild swear word that denotes frustration, annoyance, or surprise. From a religious perspective, this term denotes the condemnation of hell. For Arab audiences, this word is regarded as offensive, particularly by religious people. Therefore, the Arab subtitlers used an euphemism in dealing with this offensive word by translating “*damn*” into “*يا لهلا اي*” (*Ya Ilahi* – “Oh my God”). In contrast, the rest of the phrase “*that is a beautiful day*” was translated by using literal translation. The subtitler’s decision to use euphemism is attributed to religious rules, which play a critical role in identifying expressions, behaviors, or words that are unacceptable to the audience (Alharthi, 2023). By revisiting the subtitling strategies proposed by Gottlieb (1992), we observe that the translator uses a combination of subtitling strategies, namely, dislocation and transfer. To clarify, ‘*damn*’ in Example (2) was translated by using dislocation to convey the same impact to the audience. In contrast, ‘*this is a beautiful sunset*’ in Example (2) was translated using a transfer subtitling strategy, which involves translating it without omitting, adding, or manipulating the textual information.

The subtitling strategies employed by the translator adequately adhered to Islamic and Arabic cultural norms. The dislocation strategy efficiently conforms to Arab religious norms and cultural values. This is accomplished by substituting a moderate English swear word with a socially acceptable utterance, thereby avoiding any offense to the religious or moral sensibilities of the viewers. The research conducted by Abdelaal (2019) and Alharthi (2023) substantiates that Arab subtitlers deliberately employ euphemisms and culturally regulated expressions to maintain a sense of propriety among viewers and to ensure

compliance with Arabic and Islamic conventions. Furthermore, transfer usage offers the audience a lucid comprehension of the intended meaning without distortion, a point also noted by Subrata and Jumanto (2023) in their analysis of subtitling strategies employed in animated movies.

A close examination of the translation shows that the subtitler used omission to deal with religious expressions that might negatively affect Arab viewers. In Example (3), "*What the hell does that mean, Grampa-son?*" was translated into "ما اللادهي نعي يذل اما" (Ma alladhi ya'ni dhalik ya jadi? – "What does that mean, Grandpa?") [Episode 5, 10:29]. This scene features Bart Simpson talking to Grampa Simpson in a parody of Japanese philosophy and culture, emphasizing a cryptic reaction of Grampa. The English expression '*what the hell*' is a colloquial term to indicate disbelief, confusion, or frustration, and the term '*hell*' itself has a powerful religious connotation of the life after death. This detail was not included in the subtitle to prevent any negative religious connotations that could be offensive to the Arabic-speaking audience. Gottlieb (1992) defines deletion as the process of removing words or phrases in the source text, although this does not diminish the meaning of the source, which is precisely the situation in this instance.

In Example (3), the subtitler did not use the word hell in order to avoid introducing a term that had negative religious implications. This omission preserves the cultural sensitivity and accords the translation with the expectation of Arabic speaking audiences. The use of a deletion subtitling strategy aligns with Al-Shloul (2025), who argues that subtitlers employ omission when omitted content does not affect the overall meaning of the context. She adds that employing deletion in subtitling religious terms enables subtitlers to align with the time and space of the translation and maintain the essence of the message.

### *Material Expressions*

The second most observed culture-bound expressions in *The Simpsons* series are material expressions. According to Newmark (1988), material expressions are defined as tangible artifacts or objects, such as food and drinks, clothes and accessories, houses and towns, and transport. In this series, we find a variety of materialistic expressions. Example (4), "يمري فوس ي ل ح م ل ك ع ك ل ع ا ب" (Bā'i'al-ka'k al-muhallā sawfa yarmī al-ka'k ghayr al-mabā' – "The sweet cake seller will throw out the unsold cakes") [Episode 1, 11:24]. This example occurred in a context in which Homer said this to his new date after he and his wife Marge were going through a trial separation. From a cultural perspective, the word "*donut shop*" has connotations inherited from American fast-food culture. To elaborate, this example denotes a causal and common place for quick snacks, comfortable food, and social gatherings. Contextually, this reflects Homer's attachment to daily and familiar indulgences,

underscoring his lifestyle and personality. Nevertheless, the subtitler generalized the materialistic utterance to Arabic-speaking audiences into "كعك الحلاوة" (*al-ka'k al-muhallā* – "sweet cake"). The use of generalization can be attributed to the fact that traditional Arabic-speaking regions might not have the same widespread donut shop culture.

Regarding the subtitling strategy used to render this material expression in Example (4), the translator used expansion. To elaborate, the translator expanded 'donut shop' into "بيج كعك الحلاوة" (*Bā'i al-ka'k al-muhallā* – "sweet cake seller"). According to Gottlieb (1992), subtitlers expand some utterances mentioned in the subtitled content to guarantee that viewers can fully capture the intended meaning of the source text. This finding agrees with Djoudi and Toubakh (2022), who emphasized the frequent use of explication and preservation in subtitling *The Simpsons* series to an Arabic-speaking audience. In fact, the use of expansion complies with the norms of Arabic culture because it helps avoid referring to a particular food establishment that might not be widely recognized in Arabic-speaking regions. Simply put, the translator tried as much as possible to provide target-centered translation.

### Social Expressions

Social expression is defined as the language used to articulate the institutional, social, and interpersonal realities that are unique to a specific culture (Newmark, 1988). In *The Simpsons* series, there is a variety of social expressions that have cultural connotations, such as in Example (5), which says "where the heck is our smoker?" It was translated into "أين خدوم هو ني؟" (*Ayna huwa mudakhinunā?* – "Where is our smoker?") [Episode, 2:18:16]. People use social expressions to express both emotions and perspectives. In this context, 'the heck' serves the dual purpose of emphasizing the statement while simultaneously conveying both urgency and frustration along with surprise. Simpson makes this declaration by addressing both his household and spectators during the crowded barbecue contest. He expressed both confusion and disbelief about the mysterious disappearance of their cherished family smokers. Social expressions seem to resist literal translation, because they are deeply inherited in culture. Therefore, the subtitler omitted this culture-bound expression. Possibly, this term was omitted because of the lack of an equivalent counterpart in the target language, as well as to avoid ambiguity. The omission can also be attributed to the space and time constraints of subtitling. According to Gottlieb (1992), deletion is used when the deleted information does not affect the intended message of the source text, particularly when it is not essential for understanding the overall message.

When it comes to effectiveness, the use of a deletion subtitling strategy aligns with Islamic norms and cultural values and respect. In doing so, the subtitler provides a relatable and accessible translation to the Arabic-speaking audience without compromising the intended meaning.

### *Metaphorical Expressions*

This section explores the metaphorical expressions in *The Simpsons* and the way they are translated into Arabic subtitles as per the taxonomy of Newmark (1988). In animated series, metaphors are commonly used to render complicated feelings, abstract concepts, or themes in a comprehensible and engaging manner for the audience. *The Simpsons* series contains a plethora of metaphorical expressions. Example (6) ‘*Does my marriage have to be something you can smell?*’ was translated into “هه مشش نأ نكمي عيش نوكي نأ يجاوز له” (*Hal zawāji an yakūna shay’an yumkin an tashummīhi?* – “Does my marriage have to be something you can smell?”) [Episode 1, 5:04]. This occurred when Marge was at the counselor’s office when discussing their struggling marriages. From a cultural perspective, the metaphor in Example (6) is associated with social perceptions, personal experiences, and relationships. In this example, the metaphor “*something you can smell*” denotes an unwanted level of exposure. This metaphor carries cultural connotations that may not be easily captured by culture. In Western culture, people tend to express their marriage relationships openly, unlike in Arab cultures where people are conservative in discussing marriage-related issues. Moreover, cultural perceptions of marriage in Arabic and Islamic cultures often advocate values such as social commitment and honor instead of sensory metaphors that are commonly found in Western culture. From a translational perspective, the subtitler opted for a transfer by maintaining the intended message of the source text without reformulating or adapting it (Gottlieb, 1992). Regarding effectiveness, this subtitling strategy might not fully convey the intended impact for Arabic-speaking audiences because of the use of literal translation. It is possible that the subtitler resorted to transfer because of the lack of an equivalent counterpart of the culture-bound expression in the target text. This translation could be improved by using paraphrasing to guarantee that the viewers are able to fully grasp the intended message such as translating it into “عيطتسي نأ ةجردل اسوملم ازمأ نوكي نأل ةجاحب يجاوز له” “هه مشسانل ا” [Does my marriage need to be so tangible that people can smell it?]. This finding aligns with Abdelaal (2019), who emphasized the use of direct translation in subtitling when the equivalent part of the culture-bound expression does not exist in the target text.

### *Terms of Address*

Newmark (1988) defines terms of address as culture-bound terms that are used to refer to or address individuals in a particular cultural context. These terms encompass kinship terms, honorifics, and titles that reflect politeness, formality, hierarchy, or relationships. In *The Simpsons* series, we identified several address terms. In example (7) we find “ينلقن نأ عيطتست له، أبي” (Abī, hal tastaṭī‘ an tuqillanī ilā manzil Milhāws? – “Dad, can you drive me to Milhouse’s house?”) [Episode 1, 2:27]. This example

was said when Bart Homer's son asked his father to drive him, but he refused because he had been diagnosed with narcolepsy. From a cultural perspective, the utterance "dad," which is equal to the meaning of "أبي" in Arabic, functions as a kinship term of address. This is a manifestation of the Arabic social norms of respecting the authority of the parents and preserving a close family atmosphere where words such as "أبي" (*Abī - my father*) can be used to express both love and respect (respect to the father). The cultural significance of this term differs as Arabic often underscores formal respect and familial bonds, which makes the translation a culturally bound adaptation, thus preserving the intended relational dynamic. To approach this example from a translational perspective, the translator used transfer and imitation. In Example (7), the former was manifested through using direct translation without formulating or adapting the text as in translating "dad" into "أبي", whereas the latter was manifested through translating "Milhouse" into "سواهل يم" by imitating the phonological pronunciation of the name to the viewers. The findings of this study align with those of Subrata and Jumanto (2023) regarding the use of transfers in subtitling animated movies. However, our findings differ from those of Sahari (2021), who highlighted that adaptation is frequently used in subtitling. The findings of our study reveal that imitation is commonly employed.

With respect to effectiveness, the subtitling strategy effectively renders Arab cultural norms and values to Arabic-speaking audiences. This is evident in transferring the respect and familiarity of the kinship term and imitating the character's identity to guarantee audience connections and cultural relevance.

## Conclusions and Implications

This study investigated the translation of *The Simpsons* series of season 27 from English to Arabic. Employing Newmark's (1988) and Gottlieb's (1992) taxonomy of subtitling strategies, we investigated culture-bound terms and subtitling strategies in the series. We also examined the effectiveness of these strategies in reflecting Arabic and Islamic cultural norms. The findings suggest that the series contains a variety of cultural expressions at the religious, materialistic, metaphorical, social, and address levels. In rendering these culturally laden expressions, the subtitler used deletions such as omitting the colloquial religious phrase "what the hell?" and the colloquial social phrase "where the heck?" to avoid religious and cultural sensitivity. This translation complies with Islamic and Arabic norms by guaranteeing appropriateness, while preserving the intended message. Our findings align with those of Alaa and Al Sawi (2023), who indicate that the subtitler can remove hyperbolic expressions that are unique to culture to save him/her from rendering cultural expressions that might be contextually or generally unknown to the target audience.

Our findings further show the use of transfer as in translating “*that is a beautiful sunset!*” into “*لي مچ س مش بورغ كل ذ*” and the metaphorical expression “*Does my marriage have to be something you can smell?*” into “*نك مچي ج اوز له*” “*ة مچش ن ا عيش نو ك ي ن*”. Possibly, the translator decided to transfer the culture-bound expression because of the lack of an equivalent counterpart to the metaphorical phrase. This finding is consistent with Djoudi and Toubakh (2022), who highlight the use of transfer in subtitling cultural expressions in *The Simpsons* series. Although this translation conveys the whole meaning, it distorts the intended meaning owing to the use of literal translation, which causes ambiguity and leads to translation loss. The translator can compensate for the translation loss by using natural and contextual translations.

The findings of the study show that the subtitler used imitation as in imitating “*Angel investors*” into “*زرتس فال ج ن ا*”. A plausible justification for transferring these phrases to Arabic-speaking audiences could be attributed to the fact that there is no direct cultural or linguistic equivalent in Arabic, leading the subtitler to retain the original phonetic structure for recognition. This finding aligns with Obeidat and Abbadi’s (2024) findings, which show the frequent use of imitation in conveying culture-bound expressions in *Barbie* movies into Arabic. This translation is considered ineffective, incomprehensible, and misleading because it fully captures the cultural and religious significance of the term. Perhaps Arabic and Islamic culture made the subtitler transfer this term because it carries religious connotations that contradict Islamic values.

Besides, the analysis revealed that subtitlers resort to expanding the materialistic expressions as in translating “*donut shop*” into “*لي ج م ل ا ك ع ك ال ا ع ا ب*”. Possibly, the lack of equivalent utterance to the term “*donut*” prompted the subtitler to add the word “*لي ج م*” to clarify the meaning for the viewers. This finding is like Djoudi and Toubakh’s (2022) findings that emphasize the use of expansion to compensate for the translation loss resulting from the translator’s unfamiliarity with the source text culture and his/her lack of experience. This subtitling decision is considered effective and accessible to Arabic-speaking audiences.

Furthermore, our findings indicate that the Arab subtitler resorted to tone down and dislocate the offensive word as in “*damn*” by translating it into “*ا ي ل ا ج ل ا*”. The removal of offensive words and the addition of religious ones clearly underscore Arab subtitlers’ attempts to foster Islamic and Arabic culture while preserving the intended meaning. This finding aligns with Sahari (2021), who argues that the subtitler endeavors to manipulate, domesticate, and tone down the cultural expressions to align with Arabic and Islamic values.

This study employs various theoretical frameworks, including Newmark’s (1988) taxonomy and Gottlieb’s (1992) subtitling strategies, to enhance the field by creating a systematic approach for analyzing cultural translations. The study of animated content shows that translating culture-specific expressions in animation is quite difficult, requiring more data and additional research methods

to improve subtitling strategies that keep cultural elements intact. Translators may consider the conclusions of this paper when addressing cultural aspects during the translation process.

However, this study has some limitations. It is limited to the subtitling of *The Simpsons* series season 27. Therefore, it cannot be generalized to other AVT practices. It is further confined to animated movies; thus, other genres are excluded. This study is confined to descriptive and qualitative analyses. In addition, there are aspects of digital content analysis systematically used to analyze the audiovisual information obtained in the episodes of *The Simpsons* found on online platforms. Analysis of the episodes was performed frame by frame, with an emphasis on the English conversations and their Arabic subtitles as textual artifacts in digital sphere. This method facilitated precise identification and classification of culture-specific words in their visual and linguistic contexts, and the decisions of subtitling were deciphered in terms of their multimodal representation. Moreover, the sample size of the study was restricted to 150 examples. Based on these limitations, the research recommends replicating it with a larger sample size to generate robust conclusions about the findings. We further recommend future investigations to use other frameworks for culture-bound types, such as Pedersen's (2005, 2011) culture-bound typologies and Aixela's (1996) model of subtitling strategies.

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