

## The Subtitling of Taboo and Offensive Language into Arabic: A Case Study of 'White Chicks' and 'Perfect Find'

**Adel Alharthi**

*Department of Foreign Languages, College of Arts, Taif University, Saudi Arabia*

[ad.alharthi@tu.edu.sa](mailto:ad.alharthi@tu.edu.sa)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v5i2.1354>

**APA Citation:** Alharthi, A. A. (2023). The Subtitling of Taboo and Offensive Language into Arabic: A Case Study of 'White Chicks' and 'Perfect Find'. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 5(2), 305–323. <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v5i2.1354>

### **Received:**

02/05/2023

### **Accepted:**

05/07/2023

### **Keywords:**

cultural gap,  
euphemism, levels  
of acceptance,  
offensive  
language,  
subtitling, taboo

### **Abstract**

*The present study investigates the use of different types of taboo and offensive language in two subtitled American movies: White Chicks and Perfect Find. The study discusses the common subtitling strategies used by Arab subtitlers to render instances of taboo and bad language found in the selected data. It also seeks to address the following two research questions: a) what are the types of taboo and offensive language in the selected data and what problems do they pose in subtitling; b) how did Arab subtitler(s) deal with taboo and offensive language and what subtitling strategies were used to render them. The classifications of taboo and offensive language by Ávila Cabrera (2014) are adopted in the current study. The research also draws on Gottlieb's (1992) taxonomy of subtitling strategies, Newmark's taxonomy of translation techniques (1988), and Williams' model (1975). The findings of the study showed that there were four types of offensive language found in the selected data, namely cursing, insult, derogatory tone, and expletive. In addition, four subcategories of taboo were found. These are references to body part, sexual reference, scatology, and ethical/racial taboo. The study also found that Arab subtitlers used nine types of strategies to render taboo and offensive language: transfer, euphemism, paraphrase, literal translation, omission, condensation, extension, dislocation, and generalization. The use of these interventional strategies indicates that, in many cases, taboo and offensive language were challenging for the subtitlers. The results of the study have gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of the nature of different types of taboo and offensive language, and how they are treated and transferred between very different languages and cultures.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Taboo and offensive language are main features of AV productions; they are used in movies, sitcoms, and TV shows. The creation of taboos and offensive elements reflects the cultural, moral, and social values of the intended receivers who can comprehend and appreciate these elements. However, when taboo and bad language are transferred to another language and culture, the task of a translator becomes complicated, especially when working across very different languages and cultures, and within some spatio-temporal restrictions of subtitling.

### **The Subtitling of Taboo and Offensive Language into Arabic: A Case Study of 'White Chicks' and 'Perfect Find'**

This study investigates the common types of taboo and offensive language used in two American movies: *White Chicks* and *Perfect Find*. The study also explores the strategies used to subtitle these types from English into Arabic. The research draws on Gottlieb's (1992) taxonomy of subtitling strategies and refers to Williams' model (1975). Moreover, references are made to Newmark's taxonomy of translation techniques (1988). The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the types of taboo and offensive language in the selected data and what problems do they pose in subtitling?
2. How did Arab subtitler(s) deal with taboo and offensive language and what subtitling strategies were used to render them?

The complexity involved in subtitling harsh words/phrases and unacceptable language requires further studies to uncover the common problems of tackling these elements, especially across different cultures. A review of the literature on the subtitling of taboo and offensive language reveals the need for more comprehensive and thorough studies that address the possible solutions that will aid subtitlers when dealing with tabooed vocabulary and bad language. This study should contribute to filling the gap in research into the treatment of taboo and offensive language.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Taboo and Offensive language**

The term taboo ('tabu' or 'tapu' in Tongan) originates from Polynesia (Fershtman 2008: 140). The term was first used by local people in Tonga island to refer to sacred figures, such as gods, kings, and monks (Mengxun 2020: 89). These names and other words were absolutely forbidden for ordinary people in the island, and "whoever commits a taboo will be punished by supernatural forces". In addition, 'tabu' was introduced to England by Cook and other explorers, and since then it has become part of the English language (ibid). The concept of taboo has evolved, especially with the improvement of human civilization; people have started to pay attention to their language when they interact with each other so that their remarks do not cause any emotional damage. In addition, social norms and religious rules play a role in determining words, expressions, and behavior that are prohibited or unacceptable. These norms and rules related to taboos have changed over time to the degree that some taboos may weaken or even disappear. For example, some ethnic or racial taboos (e.g., nigga) were prohibited in the past, but they are now used in media, especially in films and standup comedy.

According to Ávila Cabrera (2014), there are ten types of taboo, including animal name (e.g., bitch), death and killing (e.g., poison, destroy, slaughter), drug and excessive alcohol consumption (e.g., Coke is fucking dead), ethnic and racial taboo (e.g., Toby the Jap), gender slur (e.g., feminazi, gold digger), filth (e.g., you shit in your pants), profane and blasphemous (e.g., Jesus [fucking] Christ), psychological and physical conditions (e.g., He is a total psycho), sexual reference and body part (e.g., go downtown, tits), urination/scatology (I'd be shitting my pants if I was you), and violence (e.g., I tagged a couple of cops).

On the other hand, offensive language refers to "any word or string of words which has or can have a negative impact on the sense of self and/or wellbeing of those who encounter it – that is, it makes or can make them feel, mildly or extremely, discomfited and/or insulted and/or hurt and/or frightened" (O'Driscoll, 2020: 5). The most common categories related to offensive language include race/ethnicity, disability, religion, sexuality, gender, and nationality. Any negative remarks related to these categories are expected to have an impact on the targets of these offences. This may include emotional harm that may vary from one person to another and from one culture to another, depending on the social and religious norms shared by members of these cultures.

Ávila-Cabrera (2014) discusses different subcategories of offensive language, namely abusive swearing, expletive, and invective. Abusive swearing has four types: cursing (e.g, Goddamn you!), derogatory tone (e.g, keep your fucking mouth shut), insult (bunch of shthead), and oath (e.g., I swear on my mother's eternal soul). Expletive offensive language includes exclamatory swearword or phrase (e.g., merde!, shit!). invective offensive language has one single form which is the subtle insult (e.g., luminaries of the Nazi propaganda).

## **2.2 Relevant studies on the subtitling of taboo and offensive language**

As mentioned in the previous section, taboo and offensive language have different forms, and the use and perception of these forms differ from one country/culture to another. In audiovisual productions, taboo and offensive language are commonly used as they normally reflect the culture in which they are produced, and transferring them into another different culture is a challenging issue. This is because audiences in many countries accept "bad language and sexual reference" differently. Thus, when subtitling/translating offensive and taboo language, subtitlers/translators must consider the context, the target audiences' linguistic and cultural expectations, and the medium of translation (Díaz Cintas 2001: 65).

Ávila-Cabrera (2014) argues that each language has its own system of taboo and offensive language, and working across different languages and cultures necessitates some changes in the intended meaning and expected impact on the target audience. However, when subtitling taboo and offensive language across cultures that are similar or share almost the same social values, viewers are expected to have the same levels of acceptance of explicit language. This means that subtitlers' task is easy, and there is no need for interventional strategies.

When there is a huge gap between the SC and TC, subtitlers' job becomes complicated, especially when the target viewers have different levels of acceptance of bad language and sexual references. In this case, effective strategies should be utilized to meet the cultural expectations of the audience. Yuan (2016) listed a number of these techniques that were used by Chinese subtitlers to render taboo language. These are specification, calque, direct translation, substitution, omission, and supplementation.

The utilization of interventional strategies depends on the nature of the ST at hand, the translation brief, and the subtitlers' stylistic preferences. This means that if the ST is full of taboo and offensive language, and the translation brief suggests the need for censoring these unacceptable elements, then subtitlers need to consider a variety of strategies to mitigate the impacts on the TL viewers.

In some cases, different subtitling policies may determine the subtitlers' techniques when tackling very pejorative and unacceptable expressions. This is exemplified in the work undertaken by Al-Jabri et al. (2021), in which they found that subtitlers of Netflix and MBC4 dealt with taboo words in the American sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* differently. The findings of the study revealed that almost all instances of taboo and offensive language in the Netflix Arabic version were rendered directly into Arabic, with little or no censorship. In contrast, subtitlers of MBC4 opted for some euphemistic strategies (e.g., widening, generalization, omission) to transfer sexual references and swearwords.

In addition, the use of the aforementioned strategies can also be governed by the stylistic preferences of subtitlers who normally rely heavily on their knowledge of the two languages and cultures, but they also have their own creativity, preferences, and ability to deal with different contexts. These factors are sometimes evident in the existence of two different versions of a particular sexual reference or swearword in a ST.

Xijinyan (2022) argues that social rules and cultural constraints may encourage subtitlers to be more creative to preserve the intended meaning of a particular instance of taboo and achieve a similar effect in the TC. This is evident, according to Xijinyan, in the use of lexical creation by Chinese subtitlers, which accounts for a high percentage (23.4%) compared to other strategies including omission (17.2%). It goes without saying that subtitlers play significant roles in filtering or preserving taboo and offensive language as they have sufficient knowledge of the expectations of TT viewers. In fact, some types and forms of taboo can be transferred directly into the TC. An example of this is the study carried out by Ben Slamia (2020) in which she argues that Arab subtitlers succeeded in transferring some taboo terms and words that express love and desire because there are no particular constraints in rendering these elements into Arabic.

Many studies have discussed the effective strategies adopted by professional subtitlers to render taboo and offensive language. Abdelaal and Al Sarhani (2021) explored the subtitling of swear and taboo words in the American movie *Training Day*. The findings of their study revealed that omission and euphemistic translation were the most frequently used strategy by Arab subtitlers. The authors argue that cultural constraints made the subtitlers' work complicated when rendering very explicit language. These findings tie well with those of Pratama (2016) and Thawabteh (2012) as both studies found that omission and euphemistic techniques were the best choices for subtitlers when tackling swear words and sexual references.

Haider et al. (2023) examined the translation strategies that were utilized by subtitlers to transfer taboo and bad language from Arabic into English. The study found that three subtitling techniques were employed. These are: taboo-to-taboo, deletion, and euphemism. The researchers stress that one clear disadvantage of utilizing euphemism is that it concealed authentic emotions connected to swear words, although the function is partially preserved.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This study identifies different types of taboo and offensive language used in two American movies: *White Chicks* and *Perfect Find*. The study examines the strategies utilized by Arab subtitlers to transfer these elements into Arabic. The following section introduces the data used in this research and discusses the research methodology adopted in the current study.

#### **3.1 Data**

Two American movies *White Chicks* and *Perfect Find* were used as corpus for the current study. *White Chicks* is a comedy film directed by Keenen Ivory Wayans and was released in the United States in 2004. The film is about two FBI agents who foiled a drug bust and were punished by their boss. They were forced to disguise themselves as spoiled socialite sisters to protect the heiresses of a hotel from being kidnapped. The *Perfect Find*, on the other hand, is an American romantic comedy film based on a book written by Tia Williams. The film is written by Leigh Davenport and directed by Numa Perrier. The films are subtitled into Arabic and other languages by Netflix. The rationale for choosing these two films and their Arabic translations is that they are rich in different types of taboo and offensive language, which in many cases pose some problem in subtitling.

#### **3.2 Methodological approach**

The process of collecting the data involved three stages: (1) making a record of all instances of taboo and offensive language in the two selected movies (33 excerpts), (2) identifying the classifications of these instances based on Ávila Cabrera (2014), (3) making a record of the 33 instances of taboo and offensive language along with their Arabic subtitles. To provide answers to the study research questions, this research uses Gottlieb's (1992) taxonomy of subtitling strategies as a theoretical framework. Gottlieb introduces ten strategies, including extension, paraphrase, transfer, imitation, transcription, dislocation, condensation, decimation, deletion, and resignation. The study also refers to Williams' model (1975), which consists of five semantic processes through which euphemism may be formed. These are borrowing, widening, semantic shifts, metaphorical transfer, and phonetic distortion. In addition, references are made to Newmark's taxonomy of translation techniques (1988). The research followed quantitative and qualitative research approaches which involved classifying each instance of taboo and offensive language. Then an in-depth analysis of the subtitling strategies is provided to unveil the Arab subtitlers effort when transferring elements of taboo and offensive remarks. Moreover, the study discussed the frequency of the subtitling strategies used by Arab subtitlers.

### **4. ANALYSIS**

In this section, the selected data will be analysed to identify the types of taboo and offensive language and to investigate the subtitling strategies used by Arab subtitlers to transfer these types into Arabic. The examples in this section will be presented and analysed in accordance with the research design adopted in this study.

#### 4.1 Offensive language

As stated before, offensive language has three subcategories: abusive swearing, expletive and invective. The analysis of the data revealed that only two types were used in the two American films. These are abusive swearing and expletive. The instances of swearing in the data were mainly related to cursing, insult, and derogatory tone.

The Arab subtitlers used the strategy of transfer through which all instances of cursing (3 examples) are rendered adequately, using the preformed Arabic equivalent. This is evident in Example 1 in which 'Goddamn' was translated into Arabic as 'اللعنة'.

Table 1: Example1 for Arab subtitlers

ST	TT
<b>Goddamn.</b> Now I'm going to bust your ass.	اللعنة. سوف أقبض عليك.  <b>Back translation</b> <b>Damn.</b> I'm going to arrest you.

The analysis of all instances of offensive language in the selected data showed that insult was the most used type (6 examples). In three instances, the Arab subtitlers used one equivalent for all insulting remarks. Examples 2, 3, and 4 illustrate this.

Table 2: Example1 for Arab subtitlers

ST	TT
<b>Example 2:</b> You want some of this, <b>punk</b> ?	أتريد القتال أيها الوغد؟  <b>Back translation</b> Do you want to fight, you <b>bastard</b> ?
<b>Example 3:</b> - Copeland! - Copeland, you <b>dick</b> !	- كوبلاند! - كوبلاند، أيها الوغد!  <b>Back translation</b> - Copeland! - Copeland, you <b>bastard</b> !
<b>Example 4:</b> And E, you shady <b>motherfucker</b> .	وأنت أيها الوغد المراوغ.  <b>Back translation</b> And you, you elusive <b>bastard</b> .

As can be seen from examples 2,3, and 4, the insulting remarks 'punk', 'dick', and 'motherfucker' were subtitled into Arabic using one equivalent 'الوغد' (bastard), even though these remarks have different meanings and references in English. The Arab subtitlers euphemized the insulting words in the TT, so that their impact on the Arab audience is minimized. It is worth mentioning that the subtitlers used the strategy of widening which involved replacing the English specific terms (dick and motherfucker) with an Arabic general term 'الوغد' (bastard).



Example 5 is another example that illustrates the subtitlers' attempts to euphemize unacceptable insulting words in the ST and replace them with less violating ones. In the example, the word 'asswipe' is an insulting and offensive word that might violate the Arab audience expectations. To convey the connotative meaning of this word, the subtitlers used a general swearword in Arabic 'قذر' (dirty), which serves the same purpose of the English insult.

Example 5

ST	TT
<b>Asswipe!</b>	قذر!  <b>Back translation</b> Dirty!

The use of general euphemized terms in Arabic to substitute specific ones is determined/governed by the levels of acceptance of bad language in audiences. This is evident in the subtitlers' treatment of previous examples that include some harsh and violating words. It is also evident in the treatment of less harsh and violating remarks. Example 6 illustrates this.

Example 6

ST	TT
The only thing that's going to be tight is my foot down your throat.	حلقك هو الشيء الذي سيصبح ضيقاً حين أدخل حذائي فيه  <b>Back translation</b> Your throat is that thing that will be tight when I enter my shoe in it.

In the previous example the intended meaning of the insult was transferred adequately although there is a slight difference in the wording. For example, 'my foot' in the ST was replaced with 'حذائي' (my shoe) in the TT. Moreover, the grammatical structure of the insult in Arabic is quite different from the one in the original text, however; the same effect of the insulting remark is achieved.

In another example of insult, the insulting remark was preserved in the TT. The word 'pig' in the character's utterance 'You're a pig. That's disgusting' was translated literally into Arabic as 'خنزير' (see Appendix 1). It was clear that when analyzing the subtitlers' translation choices in this example and in Example 6, there was no attempt to euphemize any insulting expressions because they are acceptable in the TC.

The third type of offensive language found in the collected data is derogatory tone. Derogatory remarks are used to show a lack of respect for someone and make him/her seem of little value. In some cases, derogatory remarks were subtitled into Arabic using the strategy of official translation (transfer in Gottlieb' terms). Example 8 illustrates this.

Example 8

ST	TT
The walk of shame, bitch.	مشية العار أيتها الساقطة. <b>Back translation</b> The walk of shame, you bitch.

In the previous example, the derogatory remarks in ST were subtitled adequately into Arabic, using the strategy of literal translation; 'shame' was rendered as 'العار' and 'bitch' as 'الساقطة'. The Arab subtitlers could have chosen a harsh word (e.g., عاهره، مومس) as an equivalent for 'bitch' in Arabic, but they opted for less violating term 'الساقطة'. Similarly, in another example (see Appendix 2), the subtitlers used the same procedure through which the derogatory remark 'skank alert' was translated into Arabic as 'إنذار ساقطات', using the strategy of literal translation. This translation doesn't sound natural in Arabic although this naturalness didn't affect the understanding of the reference, especially if we consider the context and the image on the screen – one of the characters uses the derogatory remark when she spots two girls approaching her.

In contrast to the procedures adopted by Arab subtitlers to render derogatory tones in the previous examples, in another example (see Example 10), the subtitlers utilized the strategy of omission and deleted the word 'fuck'. They also compensated for the loss of the derogatory tone by using the word 'فوراً' (immediately).

Example 10

ST	TT
Get the fuck out of my house!	اخرجني فوراً من منزلي! <b>Back translation</b> Get out immediately from my house!

In addition to the insulting and derogatory remarks used in the two American films, two instances of expletive offensive language were found. In the first instance (see Example 11), the strategy of omission was used to render the swearword 'big ass' in the character's utterance 'Is that all your big ass got?'. This means that the resulting translation 'هل هذا هو كل ما لديك؟' (Is that all what you have?) doesn't include any offensive elements. In the other example that contains expletive offensive language (see Appendix 3), the Arab subtitlers used euphemism to subtitle the exclamatory swearword 'shit' into Arabic as 'تياً' (Damn!). The utilization of this strategy didn't affect the intended meaning of the ST.



## Example 11

ST	TT
Is that all your big ass got?	هل هذا هو كل ما لديك؟ <b>Back translation</b> Is that all what you have?

## 4.2 Taboo

There are plenty of examples in the selected data that illustrate the excessive use of different forms of taboo, including ethnic and racial taboo, body part, sexual references, scatology. References to body parts and sex are the most commonly used forms of taboo, and the treatments of these references differ from one situation to another.

When dealing with taboo words that refer to body parts, Arab subtitlers opted for some interventional strategies. The possible reason for using these strategies is that taboos need to be euphemized without losing their intended meaning. This is evident, in Example 13, in which two strategies were utilized: omission and condensation. The reference to the body part 'ass' was omitted and the whole phrase 'chewing my ass' was condensed to one single word in Arabic 'يوبخني' (scolding me).

## Example 13

ST	TT
The chief is <b>chewing my ass</b> right now. I got to call you back. Bye.	الرئيس يوبخني الآن. سأتصل بك لاحقاً. <b>Back translation</b> The boss is <b>scolding me</b> now. I'll call you later.

The utilization of omission and condensation is also evident in the subtitling of other instances that include taboo words (body part). In one of these instances (see Appendix 4), the body part 'ass' in the character's utterance: 'but you're a grown-ass woman' was omitted in the TT, and the adjective 'ناضجة' (grown) was used as an equivalent for "grown-ass". It is clear from the resulting translation that the intended meaning of the character's utterance was preserved in the TT.

The strategy of omission seems to be the easiest and most appropriate choice for Arab subtitlers when subtitling references to body parts. To illustrate this point clearly, in Example 15, 'drop their ass off in Hampton' was subtitled into Arabic as 'كل ما علينا هو أن نقل هاتين الفتاتين' 'إلى هامبتون'; the body part 'ass' was deleted in the TT and the whole phrase 'drop their ass off' was replaced with 'نقل هاتين الفتاتين' (we drop these two girls). The subtitlers used 'هاتين الفتاتين' (these two girls) to euphemize the taboo in the ST and preserve the intended meaning.

## Example 15

ST	TT
<p><b>Drop their ass</b> off in the Hamptons, then we back...</p>	<p>كل ما علينا هو أن نُقَل هاتين الفتاتين إلى هامبتون، ونستعيد...</p> <p><b>Back translation</b> All what we have to do is to <b>drop these two girls</b> in Hampton, and we back...</p>

Omission was also used with another example (see Appendix 5) that contains a reference to a body part. In the example, the waiter addresses two characters, informing them that they are not on the list. One of the character responds to her with anger: 'Invitation, my ass'; the character's utterance was subtitled into Arabic as 'لا حاجة لدعوة'. The subtitlers deleted 'my ass' in the TT and paraphrased the ST. Similarly, in another example (see Appendix 6), omission was used when subtitling the taboo word 'marshmallows', which refers to the lady's breast. The word was omitted in the TT, and 'watch those marshmallows' was rendered into Arabic as 'احترسي' (watch out).

In some cases, Arab subtitlers used euphemism (widening) to render taboo words that may violate the expectations of Arab audience. In one of the examples (see Example 17), there is a reference to a body part (dick), and the Arab subtitlers used a general term 'نكر' (male) to subtitle it into Arabic. A possible reason for opting for widening is that the subtitlers felt that the taboo in the ST is inappropriate and therefore translating it directly will be unacceptable.

#### Example 17

ST	TT
<p>Yes, and some new <b>di**</b>. - There's that.</p>	<p>نعم، ونذكر جديد. - وهذا أيضاً.</p> <p><b>Back translation</b> Yes, and a new <b>male</b>. And this as well.</p>

In another example (see Appendix 7), the strategy of euphemism (widening) was also used by Arab subtitlers to render another taboo that is related to body part. The ST sentence: 'Eric got him some vintage pussy' was subtitled into Arabic as 'إريك وجد امرأة عتيقة'. The word 'pussy' was replaced with the noun 'إمرأة' (woman), which is not the preformed equivalence in Arabic. However, this procedure didn't affect the intended meaning of the ST.

There are some instances of taboos that were subtitled into Arabic using the strategy of transfer (literal translation). By way of illustration, in Example 19, the taboo word 'pussy' in the ST was replaced with its preformed equivalence 'فرجي'. The same strategy was used with another example (see Appendix 8), in which 'pussies' was rendered into Arabic as 'الفروج'.

## Example 19

ST	TT
- Oh, I love when you guys think about my <b>pu***</b> .	أحب تفكيركما في فرجي. <b>Back translation</b> I like your thinking in my <b>pu***</b> .

As mentioned in the analysis of the previous examples, closer inspection of the data showed that, in some cases, the Arab subtitlers tended to subtitle taboo that is related to body part into Arabic using the preformed equivalence. In Example 20, 'vagina' was rendered into Arabic as 'الفروج' (vaginas). The Arab subtitlers opted for the plural form of the preformed equivalence, although the noun in the ST is singular. A possible reason for this procedure is the stylistic preference of the subtitlers, which sometimes involves changing the structure or wording of the ST.

## Example 20

ST	TT
That's what friends are for. We are voices for <b>vagina</b> .	هذا واجب الصديقات. نحن صوت الفروج. <b>Back translation</b> This the duty of friends. We are voice of <b>vaginas</b> .

In addition to taboo words and phrases that are related to parts of the body, closer inspection of the selected data revealed that there were many instances of sexual references. In some cases, the Arab subtitlers euphemized these references so that they became acceptable and appropriate for Arab audience. This is evident in Example 21, in which the sexual reference 'bone' was euphemized in the TT. The subtitlers paraphrased 'bone' in Arabic as 'ما تزالان مثيرتين' (they are still sexy).

## Example 21

ST	TT
I never noticed how big they are but I'd still <b>bone</b> .	لم ألاحظ كبير حجمهما من قبل لكنهما ما تزالان مثيرتين. <b>Back translation</b> I didn't notice their size before, but they are still sexy.

Euphemism was also used with another example (see Appendix 9) that contained a sexual reference. The utterance 'I'm boinking someone' means to 'have sex with someone'. This

**The Subtitling of Taboo and Offensive Language into Arabic: A Case Study of 'White Chicks' and 'Perfect Find'**

taboo element was paraphrased in Arabic as 'سأنال من إحداهن الليلة' (I will get one of them tonight). The verb 'get' (ينال) has a general meaning that can be understood through the context - the speaker has a future plant to have sex with someone.

In some cases, the Arab subtitlers used the strategy of omission when dealing with some sexual references. In Example 22, two female characters are having a conversation and one of them is blaming the other character for ruining her life. The character's utterance contains a sexual reference (to fuck), which was omitted in the TT. Although omission usually involves a drastic change in the process of transferring a ST element into the TT, the strategy didn't affect the intended meaning in Example 22.

Example 22

ST	TT
...that I run out of boyfriends <b>to fuck</b> ,	إلى حد أنك لم تتركي لي حبيباً،  <b>Back translation</b> To the extent that you didn't leave a boyfriend for me.

Interestingly, in other cases, Arab subtitlers subtitled some sexual references directly into Arabic. This is evident in Example 23 in which a female character gets into an argument with another character concerning some incidents in the past. The character's utterance contains a sexual reference '...and you fucked my boyfriend', which was subtitled as 'وضاجعتي حبيبي', using the strategy of transfer. In addition, in a similar example (see Appendix 10), which includes the sexual reference 'slept with', the Arab subtitlers used the verb 'عاشرت' which has different meanings in Arabic one of which is 'to have sex with'. It's worth mentioning that 'عاشرت' is less taboo than 'ضاجعتي' in Example 23.

Example 23

ST	TT
You stole every job I ever wanted, and you <b>fucked my boyfriend</b> .	سرقت مني كل وظيفة أردتها، وضاجعتي حبيبي.  <b>Back translation</b> You stole from me every job I wanted, and <b>fucked my boyfriend</b> .

The third type of taboo found in the data is scatology. There were some instances that include references to human or animal excrement. The Arab subtitlers dealt with these instances differently, depending on the context and the need for euphemistic strategies. In Example 25, 'poopsie' is a colloquial term that refers to excrement, and the subtitlers used a formal phrase 'أحدثت' to transfer its meaning into Arabic. The resulting Arabic formal phrase is general and less taboo than other possible phrases in Arabic (خراجة، براز، غائط), which could serve the same purpose of the ST taboo phrase.

## Example 25

ST	TT
Oopsie! I had a <b>poopsie</b> .	معذرة! لقد أحدثت.

Similarly, in another example (see Appendix 11), the strategy of euphemism (widening) was used with a taboo word. The verb 'farting' in the character's utterance 'He's been farting for the last 20 minutes' was rendered into Arabic as 'يُحْدِثُ', which is a general and less taboo term. The subtitlers could have used the preformed equivalence 'يضرط', but They decided to opt for a less taboo term that would meet the expectations of the TT audience.

The analysis of examples related to scatology revealed that the word 'shit' was used by two characters in three different scenes and was treated in three different ways. In Example 27, the Arab subtitlers didn't opt for literal translation to render the literal meaning of 'shit'. Instead, they transferred the sense of the word and its intended meaning. Thus, 'don't shit' was translated as 'تعبث'. In addition, the same procedure was adopted to render 'shit' in Example 28, in which it was replaced with 'شيئاً' (anything), and in Example 29, in which it was substituted with 'العمل' (work).

ST	TT
<b>Example 27:</b> Yo, don't <b>shit</b> where you eat.	لا تعبث حيث تعمل. <b>Back translation</b> Don't mess around where you work.
<b>Example 28:</b> You didn't do <b>shit</b> for me.	لم تفعل شيئاً لأجلي <b>Back translation</b> You didn't do <b>anything</b> for me.
<b>Example 29:</b> Now working at Darzine, though, that <b>shit</b> might get you in a casket.	أما العمل في دارزين فربما يقتلك. <b>Back translation</b> As for the <b>work</b> at Darzine it may kill you.

The last type of taboo found in the selected data is ethnic and racial taboo. There were four instances of this type, three of which were translated literally. In Example 30, the racial reference 'Russian' was used in a negative statement: 'that fucking Russian toad'. The reference was subtitled as 'الروسية', and the intended meaning of the negative statement was preserved in Arabic through the use of the adjective 'التافهة' (stupid).

Example 30

ST	TT
And then that fricking <b>Russian</b> toad made me look...	وتلك الروسية التافهة جعلتني أبدو...  <b>Back translation</b> And that stupid <b>Russian</b> made me look...

In two examples (see Examples 31 & 32) which include references to black people, the Arab subtitlers used one Arabic term to render these references. In Example 31, the taboo word 'Negro' was subtitled into Arabic as 'الزنجي', which is the official equivalent. The same procedure was adopted when subtitling 'jigaboo' into Arabic as 'الزنجي' (see Example 32).

ST	TT
<b>Example 31:</b> Negro, please.	رجاء أيها الزنجي.
<b>Example 32:</b> Someone get this <b>jigaboo</b> away from me!	أبعدوا هذا الزنجي عني.  <b>Back translation</b> Take away this <b>nigger</b> from me.

In the previous examples, the two terms 'Negro' and 'jigaboo' were used in two negative contexts, and the Arab subtitlers used their preformed equivalents to preserve their intended negative meaning. In contrast, in one instance (see Appendix 12), the term 'nigga' was used in a positive context: 'that nigga's fine'. To transfer this positive meaning, 'nigga' was replaced with 'فتى' (boy) in the TT.

To sum up, based on the analysis of all instances of taboo and offensive language, Arab subtitlers dealt with these elements in different ways. In some cases, they opted for literal translation to transfer the intended meanings of taboo and offensive words and achieve the same effect. On the other hand, in other cases, interventional strategies were used to euphemize inappropriate and unacceptable references; some drastic changes were made to the ST through the utilization of the strategy of omission.

## 5. DISCUSSION

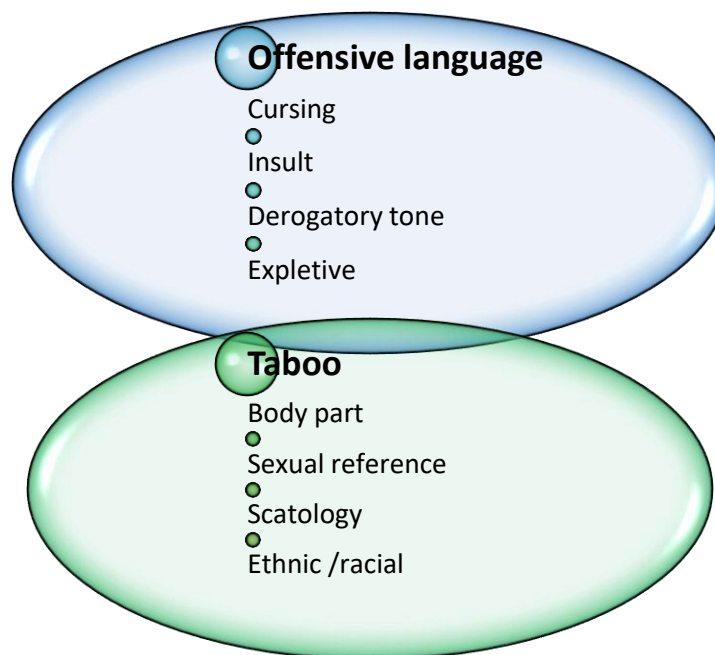
The aim of this section is to present the findings of this current study in relation to the types of taboo and offensive language found in the selected data, and the strategies used by Arab subtitlers when dealing with these types. The section also tries to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the types of taboo and offensive language in the selected data and what problems do they pose?
2. How did the Arab subtitler(s) deal with taboo and offensive language and what subtitling strategies were used to render them?



With respect to the first research question, the analysis of the data, as shown in Figure 1, revealed that there were four types of offensive language: cursing, insult, derogatory tone, and expletive. Insult was the most used type with 6 examples, cursing and derogatory tone were the second most used subcategories with 3 examples each, and expletive was the third with 2 examples. In addition, four forms of taboo were found in the selected data. These are references to body parts, sexual references, scatology, and ethical/racial taboo. Taboo words that are related to body part were the most frequently used with 9 examples, sexual references and scatology were the second common with 5 examples each, and ethic/racial taboo were the third with 4 examples.

*Figure 1.* Types of taboo and offensive language found in the selected data.

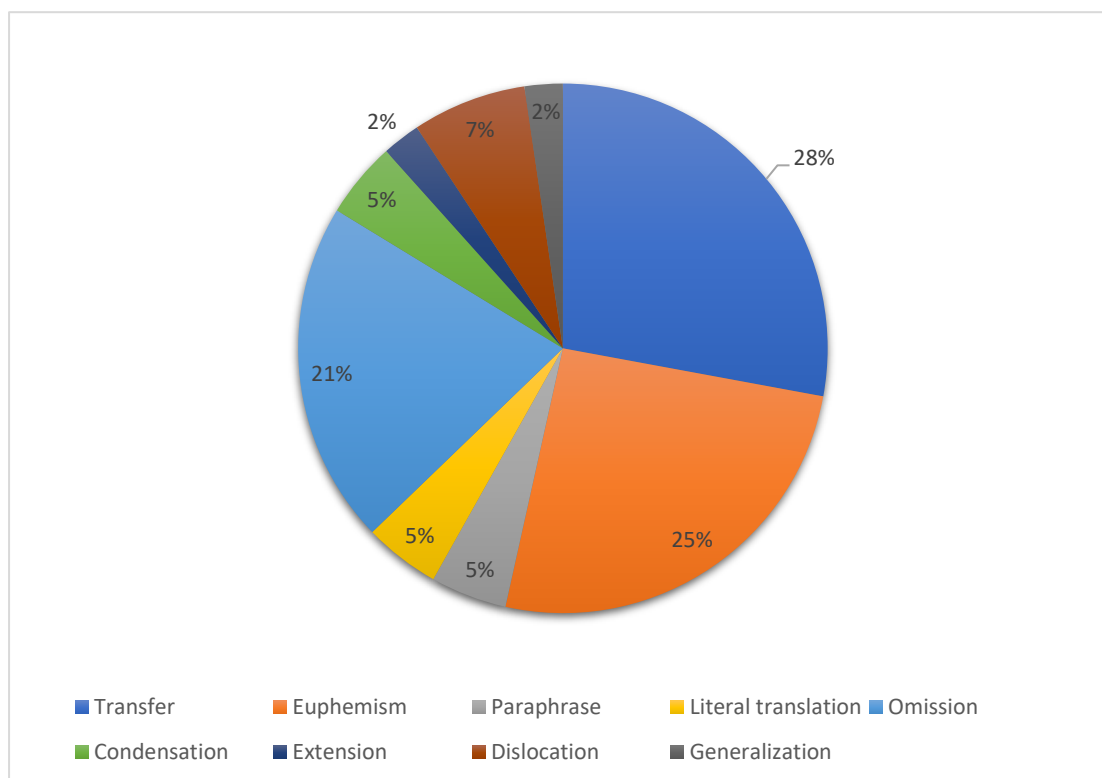


Tackling different subcategories of taboo and offensive language in audiovisual production is a very challenging task, especially in subtitling which is governed by spatio-temporal and other factors, such as characters' movements and facial expressions. In addition, subtitlers work across different languages and cultures, and bridging the huge linguistic and cultural gap between them requires some efforts, especially if we consider that the levels of acceptance of offensive and taboo language differ from one country to another.

It was clear from the analysis of the data that Arab subtitlers were fully aware of the difficulties posed by instances of offensive expressions and taboo words/phrases. This is evident in the utilization of various interventional strategies which, in many cases, enhanced the understanding of the message by the TT audience. This effort made by the subtitlers is clear in Examples 25, in which a reference to human excrement was replaced with an appropriate reference in Arabic, and in Example 22, in which the taboo word 'fuck' was omitted in the TT to avoid violating the expectations of the intended audience. Furthermore, in Example 21, the sexual reference 'bone' was euphemized, and the whole utterance was paraphrased so that the message could be preserved. The same procedure was adopted in the subtitling of other instances of taboo (see Example 15).

With regard to the second research question, the findings of the study, as shown in Figure 2, showed that nine strategies were adopted by Arab subtitlers to render many instances of taboo and offensive language. These are transfer, euphemism, paraphrase, literal translation, omission, condensation, extension, dislocation, and generalization.

Figure 2. Frequency of translation strategies used to render offensive and taboo language.



The strategy of transfer, as can be seen from Figure 2, is by far the most frequently used technique with a percentage of 28. A possible reason behind opting for transfer in many cases is the fact that offensive and taboo words/phrases are acceptable in the target culture. This is evident in all instances of cursing (see Example 1). Another possible reason is the medium of translation (i.e., subtitling), in which the message is transferred through different channels: the image on the screen, the characters' facial expression, sound, and the context. In other words, when subtitling AV productions, the decision to change, delete, or even euphemize a particular utterance may cause confusion amongst the intended audience. Therefore, preserving offensive language or taboo words/phrases will contribute to the understanding of a particular scene (see Examples 30, 31, and 32).

The strategy of euphemism is the second most commonly utilized strategy (25 percent) to render taboo and offensive language in the selected American films. Euphemism in many cases involved using general terms instead of specific ones as in Example 17, in which 'dick' was subtitled into Arabic as 'ذكر' (male), and as in Appendix 7 in which 'pussy' was replaced with 'امرأة' (woman). By opting for euphemism, Arab subtitlers made great effort to meet the cultural expectations of Arab viewers.

Omission, as shown in Figure 2, is the third most common strategy in subtitling instances of taboo and offensive language (21 percent). This strategy involved omitting the ST elements that are too offensive or unacceptable in the target culture. This is evident in, for instance, in Example 11, in which the body part 'ass' was deleted in the TT. In addition, the strategy of omission was used in rendering sexual references as in Example 22, in which the reference 'fuck' was omitted.

The strategies of extension and generalization were the least used techniques (2 percent). Extension was utilized to render one instance of taboo, in which the TT was expanded by adding extra information to guide the target audience (see Example 15). Generalization, on the other hand, was adopted in one example that includes ethnic and racial taboo 'nigga', which was rendered into Arabic using the general term 'فتى' (boy).

In some cases, the strategy of couplets is used to subtitle some instances of taboo. This strategy involves using more than one strategy to render the ST. This can be seen in the subtitling of Example 13, in which the body part 'ass' was deleted and the phrase 'chewing my ass' was condensed to one single word in Arabic 'يوبخني' (scolding me), (see also Appendix 4). Moreover, the use of couplets is evident in the treatment of one instance of sexual references (see Example 21), in which 'bone' was euphemized and the whole utterance was paraphrased to preserve the intended message.

Some findings of this study - in terms of the various subtitling strategies used to subtitle taboos and offensive language - tie well with those discussed in Thawabteh (2012), Pratama (2016), Al-Jabri et al (2021), and Abdelaal and Al Sarhani (2021). However, the current study highlights the utilization of a wide range of translation strategies that received less attention in the previous studies. These are transfer, paraphrase, literal translation, condensation, extension, dislocation, and generalization.

The findings of the current study have some implications related to subtitling of taboo and offensive language. The insights gained from these findings may be of assistance to Arab subtitlers when dealing with different types of taboo and offensive elements in AV productions.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study set out to explore the types of taboo and offensive language found in the American movies: *White Chicks* and *Perfect Find*. The study investigated the subtitling strategies used by Arab subtitlers to render these types. The findings of the current research revealed that there were various types of taboo and offensive language in the selected data; these types were rendered into Arabic through different subtitling strategies, namely transfer, euphemism, paraphrase, literal translation, omission, condensation, extension, dislocation, and generalization. Furthermore, the research has also shown that, in some cases, the huge cultural differences between English and Arabic, and the Arab viewers' levels of acceptance of bad language and sexual references might have an impact on the utilization of these techniques and subsequently on the resulting subtitles.

## REFERENCES

- Al-Adwan, A. S. (2015). Towards a model of euphemisation in Arabic subtitling. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, 4, 6-21.
- Al-Jabri, H. et al. (2021). A comparison of euphemistic strategies applied by MBC4 and Netflix to two Arabic subtitled versions of the US sitcom how I Met Your Mother. *Heliyon*, 7(2).
- Abdelaal, N. M. & Al Sarhani, A. (2021). Subtitling strategies of swear words and taboo expressions in the movie "Training Day". *Heliyon*, 7,1-9.
- Ávila-Cabrera, J. J. (2015). An account of the subtitling of offensive and taboo language in Tarantino's screenplays. *Sendebarr*, 26, 37-56.
- Ávila-Cabrera, J. J. (2016). The treatment of offensive and taboo terms in the subtitling of Reservoir Dogs into Spanish. *Trans. Revista de Traductologia*, 20, 25-40.
- Baines, R. (2015). Subtitling taboo language: using the cues of register and genre to affect audience experience? *Meta*, 60(3), 431–453.
- Ben Slamia, F. (2020). Translation strategies of taboo words in interlingual film subtitling. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation (IJLLT)*, 3(6), 82-98.
- Chen, X. (2022). Taboo language in non-professional subtitling on Bilibili.com: a corpus-based study. *Languages*, 7(138), 1-21.
- Díaz Cintas, Jorge. (2001). Sex, (sub)titles and videotapes. In *Traducción subordinada II: el subtitulado (inglés – español/galego)*. Lourdes Lorenzo García and Ana María Pereira Rodríguez (eds), 47-67. Vigo: Universidad de Vigo.
- Fershtman, C. et al. (2008). Taboos and identity: considering the unthinkable. *American Economic Journal: Microeconomics*, 3(2), 139-64.
- Haider, A. et al. (2023). Subtitling taboo expressions from a conservative to a more liberal culture: the case of the Arab tv series Jinn. *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 1–23.
- Mengxun, F. (2020). Sociolinguistics study on taboos. *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, 7(1) 88-92.
- O'Driscoll, J. (2020). *Offensive language: taboo, offence, and social control*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Pratama, A. D. Y. (2016). Taboo words and their translation in subtitling: a case study in "The Help". *Retorika: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa*, 2(2), 350-363.
- Thawabteh, M. A. (2012). The translatability of euphemism and dysphemism in Arabic-English subtitling. *Lexis*, 7.
- Williams, J. (1975). *Origins of the English Language*. New York: Free Press.

- Wu, S. J., & Wan, Q. (2021). Euphemistic strategies used in subtitling English taboo expressions into Chinese: a case study of Big Little Lies . *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 9, 397-406.
- Yuan, L. (2016). *The Subtitling of sexual taboo from English to Chinese*. (Unpublished PhD thesis), Imperial College London, London.