



Examining the Quality of Arabic Subtitles: A Multi-dimensional Assessment Approach

Maram Al-Shareef

Department of English, Faculty of Languages, Sana'a University, Yemen

maramalshareef90@gmail.com

Abdulhameed Ashuja'a

Department of Translation, Faculty of Languages, Sana'a University, Yemen

abd.alshujaa.1@su.edu.ye , ashujaa2@gmail.com

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Abstract

Interlingual subtitling is a form of audiovisual translation, which plays an important role in making content accessible and breaking language barriers in various settings, including the Arab world. Interlingual subtitling is a demanding task as it involves complex procedures that lead to significant quality issues. This study aims to investigate the quality of the Arabic subtitles that contain nicknames in the American TV series *Lost*. A mixed method approach was adopted to analyze 41 subtitles selected from the TV series *Lost* based on Pedersen's (2017) FAR model. The results revealed significant errors in terms of functional equivalence and readability. It is, therefore, advisable for Arab subtitlers to preserve the *skopos* (purpose) of the original utterance, and obtain technical abilities to improve the quality of the Arabic subtitling.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the Arab world, interlingual subtitling is one of the most important forms of Audiovisual Translation (AVT) that is widely used (Slamia, 2015). It is one of the two fundamental modes of AVT (Chaume, 2013; Cintas & Orero, 2010; Liu, 2014; Matkivska, 2014; Mujiyanto, 2019). AVT is known as a challenging and demanding task (Thawabteh, 2011) as "the number of possible audiovisual translation problems is endless and a list that would account for each one of them can never be finite" (Karamitroglou, 2000, p. 104). Debbas and Haider (2020) emphasize that subtitling processes present challenges that require careful analysis and evaluation. Therefore, it is important to investigate and assess the subtitling quality.

Translation quality assessment (TQA) is a crucial component of any translation theory, based on which models of TQA will always reflect an overall theoretical framework (Hönig, 1998). According to Lauscher (2000), "the growing importance of translating and translations in a globalized world has turned translation quality and translation quality assessment into topics of public interest" (p. 149). Models and methods used in TQA are essential in an increasingly competitive market where quality-focused translators face tremendous client demands (Castilho, Doherty, Gaspari, & Moorkens, 2018). Scholars (Hönig, 1998; Newmark, 1988; Williams, 2004; Williams, 2009) emphasize the importance of TQA as it plays a crucial role in both theoretical and practical aspects of translation.

TQA procedures and techniques may apply to any kind of translation mode, including subtitling. Assessing the quality of subtitling is important as it can help improve the process of

creating subtitles and the way they are received by the target audience. Excellent subtitles cannot only bring the truest language features to the audience but can also help them learn a bit of a foreign language. It can bring the audience closer to a foreign culture and make them feel less distanced (Lv, Zhu, & Ning, 2014), which makes the quality of subtitles an important matter that calls for investigation and improvement.

It has been reported in the literature that subtitling is one of the under-researched topics (Altahri, 2013; Cintas, 2004; Furgani, 2016; Zojer, 2011), Cintas (2004) attributes this lack of research to the inapplicability of many translation concepts and theories to audiovisual translation, leading scholars to focus on less demanding areas. The polymorphic nature of audiovisual programs presents challenges in working with various materials, and limited access to these materials hampers research efforts. The duality of media, combining visual and auditory information, adds complexity to assessing translation solutions. Subtitling quality assessment becomes even more complicated due to these factors. Pedersen (2017) calls this process “assessing that elusive beast” (p. 211). The assessment process for subtitling can be complex due to various factors. The multifaceted nature of subtitling requires a demanding evaluation process, making the assessment process more complicated compared to other types of translation.

Studies on Arabic subtitling seem to be scarce (Abdelaal, 2019; Furgani, 2016; Gamal, 2014; Thawabteh, 2011) compared to the studies on translation in general. The research on AVT in relation to Arabic is humble (Thawabteh, 2011). A review of the existing body of literature spanning the past twenty years and focusing on subtitling research in the Arab World highlighted several areas that require further investigation, including the relevance of subtitling to translation theories and linguistic models, the need for accessibility studies, and the potential benefits of subtitling in foreign language teaching. (Al Tamimi & Mansy, 2023). This indicates that research on assessing the quality of Arabic subtitling quality is limited. Therefore, assessing and investigating Arabic subtitling quality becomes an important issue and imperative.

This study, therefore, aims to provide insights into improving the quality of Arabic subtitling by assessing the Arabic subtitling quality and highlighting the subtitling errors that might affect the subtitling quality. Identifying errors related to functional equivalence, acceptability, and readability, this paper brings to the fore areas that would require attention in the subtitling process. Moreover, the adoption of Pedersen’s (2017) FAR model also provides a framework for future studies in the field and subtitling practitioners.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of subtitling can be defined as the process of adding text to any audiovisual media to express the message that is being spoken. The resulting text on the screen, known as subtitles, can be in the same language (intralingual subtitling) or another target language (interlingual subtitling) (Abdelaal, 2019, p. 2). According to Gottlieb (1998), subtitling and dubbing have dominated screen translation since 1929. Cintas (2012) argues that subtitling is an ideal method of translation for globalization and is highly favored on the internet because it is quick, affordable, adaptable, and straightforward to create. No doubt subtitling is a widely used mode; however, the debate over the preferred mode of (AVT) has not been settled yet.

Although subtitling quality is “a crucial matter that needs to be investigated, assessed, and modified” (Debbas & Haider, 2020, p. 6), only a small number of studies have focused on subtitling quality and/or its assessment (Hu, 2021; Kuo, 2020). Audiovisual productions and subtitling are widely used in today’s digital world (Szarkowska, Cintas, & Gerber-Morón, 2020). However, subtitling quality seemed to be poor recently (Kuo, 2017) which called for

academic exploration of the issues affecting the quality of subtitles and recommendations to enhance TQA's position within the subtitling industry.

With regard to taxonomies used for assessing subtitling quality, some scholars (Pedersen, 2008; Pedersen, 2017; Robert & Remael, 2017; Romero-Fresco & Martínez, 2015) have proposed subtitling assessment taxonomies. Based on the review of these subtitling quality assessment taxonomies, Pedersen's (2017) FAR model was found to be the only model that was designed for assessing the quality of interlingual subtitling.

Pedersen's (2017) FAR model assesses subtitle quality in three areas: Functional equivalence (conveying speaker meaning); Acceptability (sounding correct and natural); and Readability (fluent and non-intrusive readability). The FAR model is based on error analysis and has a penalty score system.

Functional equivalence focuses on conveying the intended meaning and has two types of errors: semantic and stylistic errors. Semantic errors are a result of the shift in meaning. The penalty score for these errors is 0.5 for minor errors, 1 for standard, and 2 for serious ones. On the other hand, stylistic errors indicate incorrect register usage or language that does not align with the style of the original with a penalty score of 0.25 for minor errors, 0.5 for standard, and 1 for serious ones.

Acceptability has to do with how well the target text conforms to target language norms. It includes grammar, spelling, and idiomaticity errors. Grammatical errors involve the violation of target language grammar in various forms while spelling errors involve errors with different severity. Idiomaticity errors make the target language sound unnatural. Penalty points for acceptability errors range from 0.25 for minor, 0.5 for standard, to 1 for serious errors.

Readability encompasses technical issues such as segmentation, spotting, punctuation, graphics, reading speed, and line length errors. Segmentation errors stem from semantic or syntactic structure violations while spotting errors relate to synchronization with speech. Punctuation errors involve incorrect punctuation usage, graphics errors concern visual elements like formatting, reading speed errors involve display speed, and line length errors occur with excessive characters. The penalty points for readability errors are categorized as minor (0.25), standard (0.5), and serious (1). Therefore, this study utilizes the detailed and well-structured FAR model to analyze the quality of Arabic subtitles in the American TV series *Lost*.

A number of studies which adopted the FAR model for investigating subtitles in different language pairs. For example, (Alexander, 2020; Gil, 2023; Koglin, Silveira, Matos, Silva, & Moura, 2022; Martins & Ferreira, 2019; Sanatifar & Ghamsarian, 2023) have examined the quality of interlingual subtitling across different language pairs and different topics, employing Pedersen's (2017) FAR model. Each study had its specific focus within the domain of assessing interlingual subtitling. While Martins and Ferreira (2019) evaluated students' subtitling work, selecting 9 films in English and French to be subtitled into Portuguese, Koglin et al. (2022) conducted a study between English-Brazilian and Portuguese to assess the quality of machine-translated interlingual subtitles. They assessed the accuracy and effectiveness of machine translation in producing high-quality subtitles however, their study was limited to a small sample size of 35 subtitles.

In a similar vein, Alexander (2020) analyzed Dutch subtitles of the English TV series *Suits*, specifically examining the translation and subtitling of legal terminology. The study provided insights into specialized subtitling practices and identified areas for improvement however, the sample size was not explicitly mentioned.

In addition, Sanatifar and Ghamsarian (2023) evaluated the emotion expressions in English subtitles of five top Persian drama films. Although their study focused solely on investigating functional equivalence errors, it provided valuable insights into the translation of emotional aspects within the drama genre. Gil (2023) assessed the English subtitle quality of five Colombian films. The two studies emphasize the critical role of functional equivalence in subtitling, highlighting the need for attention to detail and cultural sensitivity during the translation process.

With regard to previous studies that applied Pedersen's (2017) FAR model to assess subtitling quality between English and Arabic, to the best of the author's knowledge only two studies (Abdelaal, 2019; Abdelaal & Al Sarhani, 2021) were conducted to assess the quality of English to Arabic interlingual subtitling, while one study (Alaa & Sawi, 2023) assessed the quality of Arabic to English interlingual subtitling using Pedersen's (2017) FAR model. Abdelaal and Al Sarhani (2021) examined the strategies employed in translating swear words from English into Arabic and assessed the quality of 40 subtitles in the movie *Training Day*. Similarly, Abdelaal (2019) examined 32 subtitles selected from the American movie *The American Pie* to identify the subtitling strategies adopted in subtitling the culture-bound terms into Arabic. On the other hand, Alaa & Sawi (2023) focused on identifying and assessing the strategies employed by professional translators in rendering culturally specific references from Egyptian Arabic into English in the Egyptian movie, *Feathers*. While all these studies presented an assessment of subtitling quality, the primary focus of these investigations was on analyzing the subtitling strategies employed in the translation process.

Based on the discussion of previous related studies presented above, it seems that there is a noticeable scarcity of research in the field of assessing the quality of interlingual subtitling between Arabic and English. Only two studies have utilized the FAR model to assess the quality of Arabic subtitling; however, their primary focus was on analyzing subtitling strategies. This limited number of existing studies highlights the novelty of the topic and the significance of and need for conducting further research. Given this research gap, the objective of this study is to evaluate the quality of Arabic subtitles based on Pedersen's (2017) FAR model to contribute to the understanding and improvement of the quality of English-Arabic subtitles of American TV series *Lost* into Arabic.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The application of Pedersen's (2017) FAR model allows for a thorough evaluation of the subtitles' accuracy, naturalness, and readability, providing valuable insights for improving the quality of Arabic subtitles.

Moreover, this study assessed subtitling quality in multiple dimensions, including functional equivalence, acceptability, and readability. To provide a thorough evaluation of the quality of Arabic subtitling, the study adopted a mixed-method approach. Qualitative analysis was used to examine the errors and provide insights into subtitling issues. Quantitatively, the study measured the frequency of errors and assessed the overall accuracy of the subtitles. After checking its validity, an assessment checklist, based on Pedersen's (2017) FAR model, was utilized to evaluate the quality of Arabic subtitling.

The study utilized purposive sampling to select a specific set of subtitles (41 subtitles) containing nicknames. The data was manually collected from the first season of the American TV series *Lost*. The series is an American TV drama released in 2004, created by Jeffrey Lieber, J. J. Abrams, and Damon Lindelof. This series was selected for two reasons: it is rich in nicknames; and it is popular in the Arab world. The Selected data was thoroughly analyzed using Pedersen's (2017) FAR to assess the quality of Arabic interlingual subtitling.

The first season of the series has 24 episodes available on DVD. The Arabic and English subtitles were downloaded from <https://www.tvsubtitles.net/> without any modifications, which explains the presence of spelling and punctuation mistakes in the Arabic subtitles shown in the tables below. The events of the series revolve around a group of people who survive a plane crash on a mysterious island. The survivors were forced to work together to stay alive. As the series progresses, they uncover more about the island’s history and their own pasts.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the quality assessment of the Arabic subtitles is presented and described based on Pedersen’s (2017) FAR model. Examples from the analyzed data are used to explain the types of errors.

4.1. Functional Equivalence

Functional equivalence received a high error score, with a 94% error rate. Out of 41 subtitles, only 9 were correct. This finding suggests that the intended meaning of the source text was not accurately conveyed in the target text. Almost all the functional equivalence errors are semantic as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1 : Functional Equivalence Errors

| Functional Equivalence Parameters | Types of Errors | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|------------|
| | Minor Error | Standard Error | Serious Error | Error-free |
| Semantic | 5 | 19 | 8 | 9 |
| Stylistic | 0 | 0 | 1 | 40 |

In the process of translating the cultural references used to create the nicknames different types of errors occurred.

4.1.1. Standard Semantic Errors

A total of 19 out of 41 subtitles had standard semantic errors as indicated in Table 1. These errors occurred for different reasons such as:

4.1.1.1. Literal Translation

The results showed that literal translation caused a pragmatic failure because literal translation focused solely on the literal meaning of words and overlooked the intended meaning behind them. The result is in line with previous research by Slamia (2015) who observed similar pragmatic errors in subtitling when the subtitles were translated literally into Arabic without considering implied meaning. Example 1 illustrates a pragmatic failure caused by literal translation, whereby the meaning is directly subtitled into Arabic without inferring the speaker’s intended meaning.

Example 1

| Source Text | Target Text |
|---|-------------------------|
| “I nominate you, Captain America” (Fury& Bender, 2004, 13:52). | أنا أرشحك, كابتن أمريكا |

In Example 1, the expression ‘Captain America’ was translated literally as ‘كابتن أمريكا’. However, the expression was used to mockingly refer to the listener’s heroic acts. The translation did not accurately reflect the speaker’s intention. The source and target texts diverged in meaning. A more suitable translation would have been ‘ايها البطل’ directly addressing

the listener as a hero. This translation would effectively convey the speaker's intention to mock or tease the listener's idealistic or self-righteous qualities.

4.1.1.2. Transliteration

The findings showed that transliterating meaningful nicknames caused semantic errors because the speaker's intention was not conveyed in the target text. The result is in line with the previous study conducted by Obeid (2018) which revealed that transliteration of nicknames causes a loss in meaning and cannot enable the TL reader to recognize the full image as it is in the SL. Example 2 illustrates the loss of the intended meaning by transliterating nicknames, yielding meaningless translations.

Example 2

| Source Text | Target Text |
|--|--|
| <p>“Her and Muhammad headed into the woods about 10 minutes ago” (Johnson, Dini & Bender, 2004, 15:00).</p> | <p>هي ومحمد ذهبوا باتجاه الغابة منذ عشر دقائق.</p> |

In Example 2 the nickname ‘Muhammad’ was given to a Muslim Arab character (Sayid) to emphasize the characters' ethnic backgrounds. However, the nickname was transliterated in the target text, leading to an error in conveying the intended meaning which is referring to the recipient's ethnicity. A more appropriate translation, such as ‘العربي’ could have preserved the speaker's intended meaning as subtitling is a pragmatic form of translation, and preserving the speaker's intended meaning is essential for getting felicitous subtitling.

4.1.1.3. Omission

Standard semantic errors were brought about because some utterances that are important to the plot were left unsubtitled leading to a loss of the meaning. Previous studies such as (Abdo & Yaseen, 2019) showed that omission can cause a loss of sense of originality and figurative language. Dickins, Hervey, & Higgins (2017) refer to the omission technique as the most obvious form of translation loss. In this study, the practice of omission resulted in a loss of the sense of the original text. Example 3 illustrates this:

Example 3

| Source Text | Target Text |
|---|--------------|
| <p>“All right, Tattoo” (Grillo-Marxuach & Williams, 2004, 14:58).</p> | <p>حسنًا</p> |

In Example 3 the nickname ‘Tattoo’ refers to a fictional character from the television show *Fantasy Island*. The character was given this nickname because, like this fictional character, he was also short in height. The subtitlers omitted the nickname ‘Tattoo’ in the target text. Consequently, the translated text did not capture the humor injected into the scene by using this name. The nickname would have been translated as ‘أيها القصير’ which represents the speaker's intention and the original effect. However, the subtitled version failed to include this essence.

4.1.1.4. Semantic deviation

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A standard semantic error occurred as a result of semantic deviation of the original. They are standard as they contain errors but still can convey the overall meaning and do not significantly impede viewer understanding. Example 4 illustrates this:

Example 4

| Source Text | Target Text |
|--|--|
| “The transmission's been on a loop for... How long, freckles?” (Lindelof & Bender, 2004, 03:49). | ...لقد ظل الإرسال يعمل لمدة كم كانت المدة، يا عزيزتي؟ |

In Example 3 the expression ‘freckles’ was substituted with ‘عزيزتي’ (dear). However, the Arabic language does not have an appropriate equivalent for the nickname ‘freckles’, which is ‘ذات النمش’. This practice led to a standard semantic error as the subtitled translation failed to convey the speaker’s intention but still had relation to the actual meaning and did not seriously hamper the viewers’ progress beyond this single subtitle.

4.2. Minor Semantic Errors

Minor semantic errors primarily encompass lexical errors, including terminology errors that do not impact the film’s plot. They receive an error score of 0.5. The result showed cases where subtitlers failed to choose the correct word. The Arabic translation of Example 5 illustrates this:

Example 5

| Source Text | Target Text |
|---|--|
| “Now what? I already gave you my statement, sheriff” (Grillo-Marxuch & Zinberg, 2004, 26:25). | ماذا الآن؟ لقد قلت لك ما لدي بالفعل أيها العمدة |

In Example 5, the term ‘sheriff’ was translated into Arabic as ‘العمدة’ which typically refers to the mayor of a city or town. Consequently, a minor semantic error occurred in which the lexical error ‘العمدة’ was used instead of the appropriate translation, which should have been either ‘المحقق’ or ‘المأمور’. This error may have arisen due to reliance on dictionary translations without considering the appropriate terminology in the target language.

4.3. Serious Semantic Errors

A serious semantic error refers to a highly erroneous subtitle. Related results showed that serious semantic errors mainly occurred as a result of substantial deviations from the original semantic content. The following example illustrates a pragmatic failure caused by the drastic semantic deviation from the original text:

Example 6

| Source Text | Target Text |
|--|---------------|
| “That chain-smoking jackass” (Abrams & Lindelof, 2004, 12:15). | الدخان مستمر. |

In Example 6, the expression ‘chain-smoking’ was rendered as ‘الدخان مستمر’. The translation deviated from the original semantic content. The Arabic translation, ‘الدخان مستمر’ (smoking is continuous), did not convey the concept of ‘chain-smoking’ (the act of continuously smoking cigarettes one after another) as intended in the source text. A more appropriate translation could have been ‘الأحمق مدمن التدخين’, this translation effectively conveys the speaker’s intention.

4.4. Acceptability

The second parameter in Pedersen’s (2017) FAR model is acceptability, which considers errors that could make subtitles sound unnatural, including grammar, spelling, and idiomatic errors. Analyzing the data revealed an acceptability error score of 0.27, corresponding to a percentage error score of 27%. Table 2 presents the frequency of acceptability errors.

Table 2: Acceptability Errors

| Acceptability Parameters | Types of Errors | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|------------|
| | Minor Error | Standard Error | Serious Error | Error-free |
| Grammar | 1 | 0 | 0 | 40 |
| Spelling | 5 | 0 | 0 | 36 |
| Idiomacity | 0 | 0 | 5 | 36 |

4.4.1. Spelling and Grammar Errors

The data in Table 2 indicates that the grammar and spelling in the subtitles align with the target language norms. However, a few minor spelling errors, which may have occurred due to oversight by the subtitler, were identified. The Arabic translation of the Example 7 illustrates this:

Example 7

| Source Text | Target Text |
|--|----------------------------------|
| “Sawyer: Oh yeah! Give it to Al Jazeera. He will protect us” (Lindelof & Bender, 2004, 06:35). | نعم، أعطه للجريدة. هو سيحمينا |

In Example 7 the word ‘protect us’ was rendered as ‘سيحمينا’ resulting in a minor spelling error as the correct spelling should have been ‘سيحمينا’. While these errors may go unnoticed, they do have a negative impact on the overall quality of the subtitle.

In terms of Grammar errors, only a minor grammatical error was identified as indicated in Table 2. Example 8 illustrates this error:

Example 8

| Source Text | Target Text |
|---|--------------------|
| “Yo, Croc Hunter ...” (Cuse, Grillo-Marxuach & Holcomb, 2004, 16:00). | انت يا صائد اللصوص |

In the translation the subject ‘you’ was translated as ‘انت’ instead of the correct translation ‘انتم’. The correct translation should have been ‘انتم’ to reflect the plural form of the subject. Since the

speaker was addressing more than one, the translation should have accurately captured the plural form to align with the intended meaning.

The low numbers of spelling and grammar errors suggest effective use of spelling and grammar checker software, contributing to improved accuracy and quality. This reflects Yeaqub’s (2021) perception of the benefits of grammar checkers in enhancing text quality. The implementation of such software can help enhance subtitle quality and ensure adherence to standards.

4.4.2. Idiomaticity Errors

Serious idiomaticity errors mainly occurred as a result of the inappropriate translation of idioms. The following example illustrates this:

Example 9

| Source Text | Target Text |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| “Well, gosh, you sure know how to butter a man up, Stay-Puft” (Litt & Grabiak, 2004, 30:49). | يا إلهي، أنت تعرف كيف تجذب الرجال |

In Example 9 the idiom ‘how to butter a man up’ which means to flatter or praise someone to gain their favor or persuade them to do something was translated as ‘كيف تجذب الرجال’ (how to attract men) this translation deviated from the actual meaning of the idiom resulting in a serious idiomatic error. A more suitable translation of this phrase could have been ‘تتملق’. The word ‘تتملق’ conveys the concept of flattery or ingratiating oneself to someone, which aligns with the idiomatic expression ‘to butter someone up’ in English. This translation choice reflects a more culturally appropriate and commonly used phrase in Arabic to convey the same idea.

4.5. Readability

The analysis of the data reveals a high error score for the Readability parameter, with a percentage error score of 40%. Readability considers errors that could render subtitles illegible, such as segmentation, spotting, punctuation, graphics, reading speed, and line length errors. Table 3 shows the error frequency in terms of readability.

Table 3

| Readability Parameters | Types of Errors | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|------------|
| | Minor Error | Standard Error | Serious Error | Error-free |
| Segmentation | 5 | 1 | 0 | 35 |
| Spotting | 0 | 0 | 0 | 41 |
| Punctuation | 31 | 4 | 0 | 6 |
| Graphics | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Reading Speed | 12 | 2 | 0 | 27 |
| Line Length | 5 | 0 | 0 | 36 |

4.5.1. Segmentation

Segmentation errors occurred as a result of erroneous semantic or syntactic line breaks. Considering the semantic and well syntactic structure of the message is essential for improving the quality of subtitles. Scholars (Cintas & Remael, 2007/2014; Ivarsson & Carroll, 1998;

Karamitroglou, 2000; Ofcom, 2021; Perego, 2008) emphasize the importance of adhering to syntactic and semantic rules during subtitle segmentation to improve the quality of subtitling. The following examples illustrate different types of segmentation errors.

4.5.1.1. Minor Segmentation Errors

Minor errors were the most frequent errors in this parameter as indicated in Table 3. These errors occurred as a result of incorrect segmentation between the lines of the subtitles. The Arabic translation of Example 10 illustrates this:

Example 10

| Source Text | Target Text |
|--|--|
| “Han. You and Chewie wanna slow down and talk to me?” (Lindelof, Cuse & Bender, 2004, 01:13:20). | أيمكنك أن تنتظر أنت و “شيوي” قليلاً و تتحدثا معي هنا |

In example 10, a minor segmentation error occurred as a result of the incorrect segmentation between the lines of the subtitles, specifically involving the break of the adverb ‘قليلاً’ from its right position within the sentence structure. The appropriate syntactic structure for the first subtitle would have been ‘أيمكنك أن تنتظر أنت و شيوي قليلاً’. This type of error reflects a failure to adhere to the semantic or syntactic organization of the message within the lines of subtitles. To ensure accurate subtitle segmentation, it is crucial to keep the linguistic units together in a single line.

4.5.1.2. Standard Segmentation Errors

Out of 41 subtitles, only 1 subtitle had a standard segmentation error. This error occurred as a result of incorrect segmentation between subtitles. The Arabic translation of Example 11 illustrates this:

Example 11

| Source Text | Target Text |
|---|---|
| “Hey, Chucky, wanna keep that kid quiet?” (Dick & Grossman, 2004, 31:52). | مرحباً يا "تشاكي" * ساحر وضع روحه في دمية * أيمكنك إسكات هذا الطفل؟ |

In example 11 the inclusion of the additional information ‘ساحر وضع روحه في دمية’ to provide context for the nickname ‘Chucky’ resulted in an incorrect segmentation between the subtitles. The first subtitle should have been immediately followed by the last one, without any intervening text.

4.5.2. Spotting

Spotting errors are related to bad synchronization with the speech or the image and this happens when subtitles appear too soon or too late. As shown in Table 3, no spotting errors occurred in the examined subtitles indicating accurate synchronization with the audio.

4.5.3. Punctuation Errors

A high frequency of punctuation errors occurred in the analyzed data. Out of the 41 subtitles, 31 (76%) exhibited minor errors, while 4 (10%) had standard errors as indicated in Table 3. This outcome indicates that the target text did not conform to target language norms. In most cases, minor and standard punctuation errors stemmed from incorrect utilization of subtitling software, particularly when text direction was inaccurately set. This indicates a lack

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of technical skills. Therefore, technical proficiency can be considered as one of the contributing factors to the accuracy of the subtitles. Scholars (Cintas & Remael, 2007/2014; Skuggevik, 2009) emphasize the importance of subtitlers' ability to effectively use subtitling software. The following examples illustrate different types of punctuation errors.

4.5.3.1. Minor Punctuation Errors

Minor punctuation errors might not be easily noticed and only affect the viewing experience if viewers are paying close attention. Here's an example to illustrate this:

Example 12

| Source Text | Target Text |
|---|---|
| "Word from the valley is Saint Jack got himself buried in a cave-in" (Johnson, Dini & Bender, 2004, 24:39). | كلام جاء من الوادي, بأن القديس جاك دفن نفسه بداخل أحد الكهوف |

In Example 12 a minor punctuation error occurred as a result of the absence of a full stop at the end of the subtitle, and the utilization of an English comma instead of the Arabic one. This lack of a proper concluding punctuation mark disrupted the structural integrity of the subtitle, while the use of the English comma deviated from the expected norms of Arabic punctuation usage.

4.5.3.2. Standard Punctuation Errors

Standard punctuation errors can ruin the subtitles for most viewers by breaking the flow. These errors occur when punctuation marks are placed incorrectly. These errors occurred as a result of misplaced or missing punctuation. The Arabic translation of Example 13 illustrates this:

Example 13

| Source Text | Target Text |
|--|-------------------|
| "- Shut up, lardo" (Abrams & Lindelof, 2004, 11:20). | "اصمت يا "لاردو". |

In the above example the quotation marks that should have enclosed the retained nickname 'لاردو' were misplaced. Additionally, the incorrect placements of the full stops at the beginning of the subtitles impact the readability of the subtitles. Furthermore, the dash, which serves as an essential marker for indicating each speaker in dialogue subtitles, was absent in the target text. To address these issues, the appropriate punctuation should be as ("اصمت يا "لاردو"). Adhering to subtitling guidelines facilitates effective comprehension for the audience.

4.5.4. Graphics

Graphics errors in subtitling consider any type of error that affects the clarity of the visual elements of the subtitle and this includes using text formatting such as the boldface, italics, color, font type, font size, backgrounds, and the position of the subtitle.

The analysis of the selected data revealed no errors related to graphics usage in subtitling, as indicated in **Error! Reference source not found.3**. This suggests that the target

text adhered to standard conventions for graphics usage in subtitling. The finding also indicates that the subtitling guidelines were followed, leading to the absence of graphics errors.

4.5.5. Reading Speed

Table 3 shows a high frequency of reading speed errors where 12 out of 41 subtitles had minor reading speed errors and 2 subtitles had standard reading speed errors. indicating a deviation from optimal reading speed. Both minor and standard reading speed errors occurred as a result of the fast display of the subtitles on the screen. The following examples show that:

4.5.5.1. Minor reading speed error

It is worth noting that, according to subtitling rules, two full-liners should be displayed on the screen for a maximum of six seconds and one line should remain on the screen for 3.5 seconds. [Pedersen \(2017\)](#) recommends penalizing reading speeds exceeding 15 characters per second (cps). Example 14 illustrates this type of error:

Example 14

| Source Text | Target Text |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| “Hey, Mamacita, you want some fish?” (Abrams& Lindelof, 2004, 11:20). | مرحباً يا فتاة. أتريدين سمكاً؟ |

In example 14 the reading speed occurred because the two lines contained 29 characters, and they were displayed on the screen for only 1.025 (1 second and 25 milliseconds) which breaks the subtitling rules. the subtitles should have remained on the screen for approximately 2 seconds to adhere to the subtitling rules.

4.5.5.2. Standard reading speed error

According to [Pedersen \(2017\)](#), a reading speed of 20 characters per second (cps) could be considered a standard error. The following example illustrates this type of error:

Example 15

| Source Text | Target Text |
|---|---|
| “You better find yourself a runway, daddy, ‘cause there ain’t a lock I can’t pick” (Lindelof, Johnson & Bender, 2004, 15:01). | يجب ان تعثر لنفسك مهرباً يا ابي لأنه لا يوجد هناك قفل لا يمكنني فتحه |

In Example 15 The subtitle composed of two lines containing a total of 67 characters, remained on the screen for a duration of only 1.926 (1 second and 926 milliseconds). This limited time poses a challenge for the average viewer to read both lines of text comfortably. It deviates from the commonly recommended guideline of the six-second rule, which suggests that viewers can comfortably read a two-line subtitle within a six-second timeframe.

4.5.6. Line Length

Line length errors occur when a subtitle contains too many characters. The maximum number of characters per line is language-specific and typically regulated by established guidelines. However, Arabic subtitling currently lacks specific subtitling guidelines. Nonetheless, Cintas and Remael (2007/2014) propose that Arabic subtitles generally adhere to a range of 34 to 36 characters per line.

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Table 3 shows that the majority of subtitles were error-free in terms of line length, indicating compliance with the recommended character limits. However, 5 subtitles had minor errors suggesting a deviation from the optimal line length. The following example illustrates a line length minor error.

Example 16

| Source Text | Target Text |
|--|--|
| “Her and Muhammad headed into the woods about 10 minutes ago” (Johnson, Dini & Bender, 2004, 15:00). | هي ومحمد ذهبوا باتجاه الغابة منذ عشر دقائق |

In Example 16, the subtitle exceeded the optimal limit with a total of 42 characters instead of the recommended 36. As a result, a minor error in line length occurred. The deviation from the subtitling standards and guidelines affects the quality of the subtitles. Therefore, adherence to the subtitling guidelines could improve the quality of the Arabic subtitles. Pedersen (2020) emphasizes the importance of adhering to established standards and expectations conveyed through guidelines and regulations in the field of AVT to improve the quality of subtitling.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The central aim of this study was to assess the quality of the Arabic subtitling of the TV series *Lost*. The quality was evaluated using three parameters of Pedersen’s (2017) FAR model: Functional Equivalence, Acceptability, and Readability. The analysis revealed different errors in each parameter.

In terms of functional equivalence errors, the analysis revealed a high frequency of semantic functional equivalence errors, indicating that the subtitled translations were not functionally equivalent. These errors occurred due to various reasons, including literal translation, transliteration of meaningful nicknames, omission of important utterances, and semantic deviation from the original content.

These results are in line with the results of previous studies including Budiana, Djoko, and Rukmini (2017) who found that the use of literal translation would result in incorrect translations when translating expressions that have implicit meaning. Additionally, Abdo & Yaseen, (2019) highlighted the impact of omitting the source text, noting how it can result in the loss of figurative language and convey a different effect compared to the source text. Furthermore, previous studies such as Obeid (2018) revealed that transliteration of nicknames causes a loss in meaning

The analysis of acceptability errors in the subtitles revealed a high level of adherence to target language norms in terms of spelling and grammar, indicating the effective use of spelling and grammar checker software. This highlights the positive impact of such tools in enhancing the accuracy and quality of subtitles. This observation aligns with the findings of Yeaqub’s (2021) study which found that the use of an Arabic grammar checker can increase productivity and improve the quality of the text.

In terms of idiomaticity, the majority of idiomaticity errors can be attributed to the mistranslating of the idiomatic expression due to the cultural knowledge gap. Translators’ understanding of social and cultural aspects, as well as their awareness of relative values, play a pivotal role in achieving accurate and culturally appropriate translations. The identified findings align with the perspectives of (PACTE GROUP, 2003; The European Committee For Standardization, 2006; Skuggevik, 2009) which emphasize the significance of cultural knowledge as a prerequisite for translation.

Among the various types of errors observed in terms of readability, punctuation errors emerged as the most common. These errors included issues such as misplaced punctuation marks. These errors impacted the overall readability of the subtitles. The main cause of these errors was the subtitlers' lack of technical skills. The complexities associated with the software's features and functions seemed to have led to misplaced punctuation. Therefore, technical proficiency can be considered as one of the contributing factors to the accuracy of the subtitles. This reflects some scholars' (Skuggevik, 2009; Cintas & Remael, 2007/2014) perspective about the importance of subtitlers' ability to effectively use subtitling software.

Segmentation errors were primarily attributed to violations of the rules governing the semantic or syntactic structure of the message, which negatively impacted the overall quality of the subtitles. These findings align with the views of subtitling experts and scholars, including (BBC, 2022; Cintas & Remael, 2007/2014; Ivarsson & Carroll, 1998; Karamitroglou, 2000; Ofcom, 2021; Perego, 2008). These experts emphasize the importance of adhering to syntactic and semantic rules in the process of subtitle segmentation, considering it a crucial technique for improving the readability of subtitles.

Line length and Reading speed errors indicate a deviation from subtitling guidelines which affects the quality of the subtitles. Following the subtitling norms and guidelines can help improve the quality of the subtitles. This finding aligns with Pedersen's (2020) perspective, highlighting the importance of adhering to established standards and expectations conveyed through guidelines and regulations in the field of Audiovisual Translation (AVT).

The findings of this study have led to certain implications and conclusions pertaining to various stakeholders who are concerned with subtitling. Stakeholders should prioritize implementing subtitling quality assessment processes to enhance the quality of subtitling. Subtitlers should invest in training and professional development to improve technical and research skills, minimize errors, and efficiently obtain information. Adhering to established subtitling guidelines is crucial to avoid inaccuracies.

Moreover, the findings highlight the significance of addressing cultural differences that can influence subtitling choices and potentially lead to subtitling errors. To ensure accurate and culturally appropriate subtitles, subtitlers should possess cultural competence of the language pair and collaborate with experts from the target culture in order to ascertain that the subtitles produced perfectly satisfy the audience. Training on cultural aspects is necessary for student-translators to deeply assimilate cultural differences so as to deliver high-quality subtitling.

In terms of methodological implications, the utilization of Pedersen's (2017) FAR model in this study holds importance for subtitlers and subtitling agencies. This model serves as a valuable tool for assessing the quality of subtitled translations and identifying errors. Researchers and practitioners can use this model to enhance the overall quality of subtitles and effectively reduce translation errors. The FAR model can provide subtitlers with a standardized approach to evaluate subtitling quality, offering guidance on their tasks.

The major limitation of this study is the small sample size. The decision to work with a small sample size was influenced by practical constraints and the desire for a focused investigation of the quality parameters. Future research with a larger sample size might build upon these initial findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of Arabic subtitling quality across a broader range of subtitles.

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Another potential area for future research is the investigation of the impact of different subtitling guidelines on subtitles quality. This research could involve comparing the outcomes and viewer perceptions of subtitles created using different guidelines, aiming to identify the most effective practices. Researchers can contribute to the development of effective guidelines for Arabic subtitling by examining the effectiveness of different guidelines.

Additionally, exploring the effectiveness of various subtitler training methods represents another promising direction for future research. This could be done through comparing the outcomes of different training approaches. Future research can contribute to developing training programs and enhancing the skills of subtitlers by evaluating the proficiency and performance of subtitlers trained through different methods at various educational and training institutions.

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AUTHORS' BIO

Abdulhameed Ashuja'a is an Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics and Translation at the Department of Translation, Faculty of Languages, University of Sana'a, Sana'a, Yemen, where he previously held a number of positions. Currently, he is the dean of quality assurance and academic development at Ar-Rasheed Smart University, Sana'a. He has been involved in translation teaching and practice since 2004. His interests include applied linguistics and translation studies

Maram Al-Shareef is a researcher affiliated with the Department of English at Sana'a University, Yemen.