



Subtitling Religious Expressions from Arabic into English in the Message Film

Mohammad Issa Mehawesh^{1*}, Ayyad Mahmoud Al-salem²

¹ Department of English Language and Translation, Jadara University, Jordan.

² Department of English Language and Translation, Jadara University, Jordan.

*Corresponding Author: Mohammad Mehawesh (m.mehawesh@jadara.edu.jo)

Research Article

<https://doi.org/10.31559/BAES2025.10.2.1>

Received: 7 Jul 2025

Revised: 16 Jul 2025

Accepted: 27 Jul 2025

How to cite this article: Mehawesh, M. I., & Al-salem, A. M. (2025). Subtitling Religious Expressions from Arabic into English in the Message Film. *Bulletin of Advanced English Studies*, 10 (2), 53-63. <https://doi.org/10.31559/BAES2025.10.2.1>



This file is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Abstract:

Background: Translating religious content from one language to another is not an easy task, attributed to linguistic and cultural differences, and the necessity to express the intended meaning accurately and concisely.

Purpose: The study explores the challenges in the process of subtitling religious expressions in the Arabic version of the film "The Message" into English.

Methodology: Data were analyzed qualitatively, based on Gottlib's (1992) strategies.

Findings: The findings of this research shed light on the pressing need to develop strategies that help overcome the linguistic and cultural barriers faced by English-speaking audiences, who may not have sufficient knowledge of Islamic concepts.

Research implications: The study emphasizes that translating religious expressions requires proficient language skills and deep cultural awareness, with the aim of preserving the religious and cultural dimensions rooted in the Arabic text within the framework of the English translation.

Keywords: audiovisual; religious; subtitling; the message; film.

1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been a great surge of interest in audiovisual translation (henceforth AVT) which includes dubbing, subtitling, and voice-overs. We are indeed living in a time of mass communication when the global audience "demands the right to share the latest text, be it a film, song, or book together across cultures" (Bassnett, 1996: as cited in Davies 2004: 67). AVT subtitling, on the other hand, preserves the authenticity of the source language by transferring both the image and the verbal code to the written code. To deliver meaningful subtitles, however, one must have an intimate understanding of the culture of the target language (TL). Piaget (1972) defines audiovisual translation as the process of translating audiovisual content such as films, television programs, and video games from one language to another. It includes translating the spoken dialogue and the visual elements such as subtitles, captions, and on-screen text.

As the name suggests, audiovisuals are created to be simultaneously heard (audio) and seen (visual), although their primary purpose is for visual perception. AVT may involve various techniques, such as subtitling, dubbing, or voice-over, to ensure that the target audience receives the intended message of the original content. The objective of AVT is to ensure that the audience experiences the same emotions and reactions as the original viewers while using a different language. As films and TV programs have become very effective methods of transferring cultures across the world, audiovisual translation has already become a very important type of translation. The transfer of such cultural items, therefore, plays a key role in connecting different worlds. Scholars use terms such as 'film translation', 'screen translation', and 'multimedia translation' to describe the translation of audiovisual products. Thus, "film translation" is related to "the entire structure of mass media in a given culture and across the boundaries of individual cultures," (Delabastita 1989: 212). The phrase "screen translation," on the other hand, refers to "a means to accomplish the L1 reader's goal – the learning of the foreign language or of the second language." Additionally, Gambier (2003: 172) defines "multimedia translation" as "the relationship between verbal output and pictures and soundtracks, between a foreign language and the target language, and finally between the spoken code and the written one." Overall, the different terms used to indicate audiovisual

translation refers to the process of transferring cultures between communities. Furthermore, they refer to the target audience's learning of foreign languages and the relationship between the source language and target language cultures. This study takes the Arabic version of *The Message* film as a sample which is subtitled with open captions, which portrays the origin and initial days of Islam. It is also known as "Mohammad, Messenger of God". This film is recognized as a groundbreaking work in Islamic cinema and is highly respected for its authentic and reverent portrayal of the life and principles of the Prophet Muhammad.

1.1 Research Questions

- What are the strategies employed in the subtitling of religious components in *The Message* film?
- What are challenges that the translator encountered in the subtitling of religious components in *The Message* film?

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study aims at investigating the following objectives:

- Identify the challenges that faced the translators while subtitling the Arabic version of *The Message* film into English language.
- Explore how religious elements are conveyed through audiovisual means, and investigate the strategies used by the subtitler in the process of subtitling.

1.3 The significance of the study

The significance of this study lies in that is the original attempt to investigate the challenges in subtitling religious expressions in *The Message* film. As Muslim researchers specializing in translation, our role is crucial in verifying the authentic image of Islam. This study sheds light on the complex process of film subtitling, particularly in the context of a film that deals with sensitive issues. This study provides insights into the linguistic, cultural, and technical competencies required for effective film subtitling. This research study can inform and improve the practices of subtitlers as well as contribute to a better understanding of the complexities of film subtitling in general.

2 Theoretical Background

AVT is described as a "translational practice that works with source texts that combine two

communication channels, audio and visual, and in this sense, it stands in contradistinction with written translation or interpreting" (Daz-Cintas 2010). Since AVT is "one of several overlapping umbrella terms that include 'media translation', 'multimedia translation', 'multimodal translation' and 'screen translation,'" (Chiaro 2009: 141). It is one of the most problematic terms in the field of translation. Since the word "AVT" was first coined, it has been used to refer to film, but more recent research has claimed that TV and videos should also be included (Daz-Cintas 2003: 194). The term "versioning" (Gambier 2009; as cited in Pedersen 2010: 5) is also used to refer to screen translation, which is intended to refer to "all products distributed via a screen, be it a television, cinema, or computer screen" (Daz-Cintas 2003: 194; Karamitroglou 2000: 1). It is also used to refer to film translation or AVT. A novel idea called multimedia translation refers to the dissemination of information across many mediums and platforms. It primarily works on localizing video games, software, websites, etc. (Daz-Cintas 2003: 194). Multimedia translation should be evaluated independently of AVT because it is primarily focused on localization (Gambier 2009: 56). Any translated content that is distributed through mass media is referred to as media translation. It is viewed as "trans editing global news" (Gambier 2009: 56). This title needs to be omitted because it may be used to refer to the journalistic translation, which includes periodicals, where the visual and aural modes are not present.

According to Neves (2005), subtitling has been a prominent means of making audiovisual content accessible since the era of silent movies, when it was known as "intertitles". Neves (2005) explains that both interlingual and intralingual subtitles, which provide written translations of spoken dialogue, have allowed individuals across the globe to comprehend messages that would otherwise be incomprehensible due to factors such as language barriers or hearing impairment. Subtitling is described as a process by which lines of text (called subtitles or captions) are added to video material and timed to match the spoken dialogue (Screen 2008). The texts or lines that appear at the bottom of the screen are referred to as subtitles or caption. Jan Ivarsson (2003) points out that the term "caption" is typically used in America to refer to "subtitles for the hard of hearing". Daz-Cintas & Remael (2007: 8) give a more thorough explanation of subtitles. They describe subtitling as a translation technique that entails displaying a written text, typically in the

lower third of the screen, that tries to retell the speakers' original dialogue as well as the discursive elements that appear in the image (letters, inserts, graffiti, inscriptions, placards, and the like), as well as the information that is contained on the soundtrack (songs, voices off). Subtitling can also be classified as "written, (2) additive, (3) immediate, (4) synchronous, and (5) polymedia translation," (Gottlieb 1992: 162).

Moreover, Gottlieb (1992) believes that when creating subtitles, it is important to ensure that the intended meaning of the source text is conveyed in a brief subtitle. He suggests that subtitling should balance the need for accuracy in the original text with the need to create a target text that is understandable and appropriate for the culture of the audience.

One of the most recent and relevant studies in this area is that of Aldualimi and Almahasees (2022), who conducted a quantitative analysis of audience responses to the English subtitles of the Arabic version of *The Message*. Their study revealed that while many viewers appreciated the effort to make the religious content accessible, several found the subtitles to lack the depth and reverence inherent in the original Arabic expressions. Phrases such as "Peace be upon him" or "In the name of Allah" were either generalized or simplified, resulting in a semantic reduction that could potentially alter the intended spiritual impact. The study highlights the importance of audience perception in the subtitling of sacred discourse but primarily focuses on viewer reception rather than the linguistic strategies employed by translators.

In the broader context of subtitling culturally bound terms, Chiaro (2009) discusses how certain elements, such as humor and religion, are often untranslatable or prone to distortion in subtitling. Although her work is centered on the translation of humor, her conceptual framework on culture-specific references offers valuable insights for analyzing religious expressions in *The Message*. The tension between foreignization (preserving the source culture) and domestication (adapting to the target culture) is especially relevant to the subtitling of religious terms, where translators must decide between linguistic fidelity and audience comprehension.

Faiq (2007) addresses the ideological dimensions of translating sacred texts and expressions, arguing that translators of Islamic content often resort to sanitizing or generalizing terms to avoid misinterpretation or controversy. This can result in a loss of theological nuance and

cultural authenticity. In the case of *The Message*, such ideological filtering is evident in how certain religious expressions are softened or omitted to cater to a Western audience, thus raising questions about the translator's role as both a linguistic mediator and a cultural gatekeeper.

Additional insights come from the work of Ghaemi and Benyamin (2010), who classify subtitling strategies into several categories, including literal translation, paraphrasing, transcription, and cultural substitution. Applying these categories to *The Message*, it becomes evident that many religious expressions are rendered either literally or through soft paraphrasing. While literal translation can preserve the structure of the original text, it often fails to convey the spiritual significance, especially when dealing with Quranic language or prophetic sayings that are rich in meaning and cultural connotation.

Al-Adwan (2015) explores the ideological implications of AVT in the representation of Islam, noting that subtitling in religious films is often influenced by both the target audience's expectations and the political or religious sensitivities of the time. In *The Message*, for instance, expressions like *Allahu Akbar* or *La ilaha illa Allah* are sometimes omitted or replaced with neutral alternatives to avoid misinterpretation. This practice, while arguably strategic, raises critical issues about the authenticity and integrity of religious representation in translated audiovisual media.

Finally, Al-Hejin (2020) contributes to the discussion by focusing on the role of paratextual elements—such as glosses, footnotes, or introductory comments—in subtitling religious films. He argues that such features could enhance audience understanding without compromising the sacredness of the expressions. This approach could be particularly beneficial in *The Message*, where Quranic verses and Islamic rituals might require additional explanatory context to be fully understood by non-Muslim audiences.

In summary, the literature reveals a complex interplay between linguistic accuracy, cultural representation, audience reception, and ideological influence in the subtitling of religious expressions in *The Message*. While some studies have addressed viewer responses or outlined general subtitling strategies, there remains a significant gap in detailed textual analyses of the actual subtitle choices and the translator's decision-making processes. This gap opens up new avenues for research that combines linguistic, cultural, and reception-oriented approaches to better

understand the dynamics of subtitling religious discourse in Islamic cinema.

3 Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

The study aims at investigating the challenges involved in subtitling religious expressions from Arabic to English in *The Message* Film. The method of this study is content analysis, which involves systematically reviewing relevant data. The study used this film as primary source of information due to its significance in portraying religious expressions. According to (Connors, 2016) movies are authentic source of data that represent naturally occurring speech produced by native speakers of a language in an often relatively short space. This makes movies a very good source of data for this kind of research. The relevant details are recorded through careful observation. The researcher selected 10 examples loaded with religious expressions from the film in order to achieve the purposes of the study. Data collection focused on the challenges in subtitling religious expressions in the film, as well as the subtitling strategies used. The findings and analysis of the study are informed by their contributions to a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

3.2 Data Analysis

After the data collection process, the researcher examined each subtitle of a religious expression to evaluate the translation and determine the translator's methodology. The researcher tested the religious expressions in the examples to show the challenges that faced the subtitler while subtitling this work and the techniques the subtitler used. The data were analyzed using the framework based on Gottlieb's (1992) classification of subtitling. According to Gottlieb (1992) there are ten strategies for subtitling as explained below:

1. Expansion: Giving more information or meaning to the target language subtitles to aid in comprehension.
2. Paraphrasing: altering the subtitle's structure to make it easier to grasp and more legible for the audience.
3. Transfer: The subtitler's primary concern is faithfully interpreting the conversation using the original words and phrases. This indicates that the text has not been rewritten or altered in any way. The transfer approach is used by the subtitler to convey the original text's exact meaning without adding any further interpretation.

4. Imitation: rewriting the source text into the target text while maintaining the same form. This is commonly used for translating the names of people or places.
5. Transcription: It involves representing the sound of unusual terms in the target language using a phonetic approximation.
6. Condensation: making the text more concise by omitting unnecessary terms and using shorter one while still preserving the intended message in order to convey the meaning of the dialogue without losing important information.
7. Decimation: an extreme form of condensation where, due to the speed of delivery or other factors, even potentially important elements of the source text are omitted in the subtitles.
8. Deletion: To remove certain parts of the source text by the translator based on their judgment that those parts are not crucial or significant.
9. Taming: In general, it promotes respectful and inclusive language use while accurately conveying the intended meaning.
10. Resignation: it is employed when it becomes impossible to transfer the meaning of a source text (SL) into the target language (TL). Cultural, linguistic, and contextual barriers often prevent the content from being translated. In such cases, the translator acknowledges the limitations and accepts that conveying the exact meaning may not be feasible. In cases where the source text contains idiomatic expressions, cultural references, or wordplay that cannot be accurately reproduced in the target language, this strategy may be employed.

4 Discussion and Results

Example One:

About the Context: After the migration (Hijrah) of the Prophet and upon his arrival in the city of Madinah, there arose a difference among the people regarding the place where the Messenger of Allah would reside. Each of them wished to host the Prophet in their own house. However, the Prophet insisted on not giving preference to any one of them over the others. Then, a divine command came, instructing them to leave the camel free to wander, and wherever it chose to sit, that would be the location where the Prophet's house and mosque would be built as the camel found its place as designated by Allah, Hamza bin

Abdul Muttalib and Zeid bin Haratha addressed the next dialogue.

Source Text (ST):

Hamza: "بسم الله نقيم بيت الرسول."

Translated Text (TT):

Hamza: We will build the house of the prophet here!

The challenge in subtitling this example is the brevity and simplicity of the source text, which consists of only five words. While the spoken Arabic sentence is concise and clear, translating it into English subtitles requires a delicate balance between preserving the essence of the statement and ensuring that the subtitle is easy to read and understand in a limited timeframe. The translator employed both the deletion and paraphrasing strategies. The translator omitted "بسم الله" (In the name of God) from the source text. This deletion was likely done to streamline the subtitle and keep the translation concise and avoid potential complexities associated with the religious reference. On the other hand, the translator must consider the aim of the film, which is to propagate the culture of Islam in detail, so the use of the deletion strategy here may affect the accuracy of the meaning. The researcher suggests keeping the phrase "In the name of God," By retaining it the translation accurately conveys the religious devotion and context of the source text. This ensures that the translation aligns with the film's purpose of transferring the Islamic religious culture as it is and respects the original intention. The paraphrasing strategy, in combination with the retention of the religious expression, captures the intended meaning while ensuring the subtitle flows naturally in English.

Example Two:

About the Context: The narrator speaks at the beginning of the film about the city of Mecca, where the Prophet Muhammad was born. He mentions the Kaaba and its significance to people before Islam.

Source Text (ST):

The Narrator: "الكعبة التي بناها نبي الله إبراهيم مزارًا للحجيج المؤمنين بالله الواحد تحتشد الآن بثلاث منة و ستين وثنا بعدد القبائل العربية."

Target Text (TT):

The Kaaba was built by the prophet Abraham for pilgrims who believed in God. It held 360 different gods, the number of Arab tribes.

In the above example, the subtitler translated the term (الكعبة) by using a transcription strategy which involves representing the sound or pronunciation of the word using a phonetic approximation. The

use of the term "Kaaba" as a transliteration effectively maintains the uniqueness and significance of the original term. It conveys the precise meaning and religious importance of the structure to the target audience. As for translating (الله الواحد) into (God) it is less expressive translation because of this term holds religious significance in Islam, signifying the monotheistic belief that Allah is the one and only deity. The accurate translation and representation of this concept are essential to convey the essence of Islamic monotheism. The researcher suggests translating it into "Allah alone" as a more accurate translation. This translation choice captures the core meaning of "الله الواحد" by emphasizing both the identity of Allah and the concept of singularity. It conveys the unique nature of Allah's oneness and avoids potential confusion that might arise from a generic translation like "God". Finally, the translator paraphrased the whole sentence to create a more fluid and natural English sentence. This paraphrased version retains the essence of the original message while making it more comprehensible for the target audience.

Example Three:

About the Context: In this scene, the companion Khalid ibn al-Walid, who was one of the bravest knights of the Quraysh tribe, declares his conversion to Islam after previously being opposed to the Muslims. This declaration takes place in front of the Prophet and some Muslims. A dialogue unfolds between him and the Muslims, represented by Bilal ibn Rabah and Zaid ibn Haritha. They discuss matters related to conveying the Prophet's message. It's worth noting that the character of the Prophet is not depicted in the film for religious reasons.

Source Text (ST):

Khaled: "أشهد أن لا إله إلا الله وأشهد أن محمداً رسول الله. هل يغفر لي الله محاربتي لك يا رسول الله؟"

Belal: "لا عليك يا خالد فالإسلام يجُبُّ ما قبله."

Target Text (TT):

Khaled: "I bear witness that there is no God, but Allah and that Muhamad is his messenger. May Allah forgive me for fighting you, messenger of Allah!"

Belal: "Fear not, Khaled for conversion to Islam cancels all previous sins!"

In this example, the translator has employed expansion strategy in translating (الاسلام يجُبُّ ما قبله) into (Islam cancels all previous sins!) by adding the word "sins" to the translation. By introducing the term "sins" into the translated subtitle, the

translator enhances clarity by explicitly conveying that the act of converting to Islam has the power to absolve previous wrongdoings. This addition caters to the target audience's expectations and understanding, effectively adapting the message to a cultural context where the concept of sins and their forgiveness holds significance. This strategy enriches the subtitled dialogue, aligning it with the religious implications of the original message while ensuring comprehension and resonance for the target audience.

Example Four:

About the Context: On the screen appears the Conquest of Mecca, which took place in 630 AD when Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims entered Mecca after facing persecution there. This event was a turning point in Islamic history and led to the establishment of Islam in Mecca.

Source Text (ST):

The Narrator:

"وجاء نصر الله والفتح و خشعت مكة تنتظر القصاص العادل لكن نبي و تدين مكة بالإسلام ديناً يأمر بالرحمة قال لهم إذهبوا فانتم الطلقاء بالعدل والإحسان و ينهى عن الفحشاء والمنكر والبغى."

Target Text (TT):

The Narrator: "And the victory of Allah had come, and Mecca yielded itself awaiting a fair decision. But the Merciful Prophet simply declared: "Leave, you are free to go." Mecca adhered to the Religion of Islam which preaches justice and good character, and prohibits corruption, evil, and injustice."

The translation of the provided example presents a challenge in capturing the emotional and impactful tone of the original text while maintaining accuracy and coherence. The source text conveys a sense of anticipation, significance, and a profound decision by the Prophet, all of which contribute to a unique effect on the reader. To overcome this challenge, the translator has employed two strategies as shown below.

The Deletion Strategy employed in omitting the term "الفتح" (The Conquest of Mecca) from the translation streamlines the subtitle, but it poses a challenge in fully conveying the profound significance of Mecca's conquest. While the absence of (The Conquest of Mecca) could potentially compromise the impact of the divine triumph, the context does offer an alternative cue through "The victory of Allah." This cues the audience that a significant triumph has taken place. The translator appears to leverage this contextual clue to compensate for the omitted term. However, the effect of the deletion strategy is twofold. On one hand, the omission adheres to subtitling constraints, enabling the concise

portrayal of the narrative. On the other hand, it potentially diminishes the explicit emphasis on the conquest itself, which is a pivotal moment in Islamic history. This contextual reliance on "The victory of Allah" assumes the audience's familiarity with the historical and religious significance, as well as their capacity to infer the omitted term from context. Despite the Deletion Strategy's effectiveness, its success varies according to audience familiarity with Islamic history. The reliance on contextual cues presents an inherent risk of interpretive variance, and the choice to omit "الفتح" must consider the balance between linguistic brevity and retaining the emotional and historical resonance associated with Mecca's conquest. The subtitler also employed the Expansion Strategy as he added the adverb (simply) which enriches the subtitled text's depth.

Example Five:

Source Text (ST):

The Narrator: "و في يوم الحج الأكبر آخر ذي القعدة من السنة العاشرة للهجرة يمم النبي جبل عرفات و نادى في الناس ليسموا خطبة البلاغ في حجة الوداع."

Target Text (TT):

The Narrator: "On the day of the Great Pilgrimage in the tenth century of the Hijrah the prophet went to the Mountain of Arafat and the Farewell Hajj, he invited the people to listen to the Final sermon."

In the above example, the subtitler decided to use a deletion strategy with this expression to address this challenge. By omitting (آخر ذي القعدة) the translator simplifies the subtitle, eliminating the specific date reference. This omission streamlines the translation, making it more concise and focused on the central event which is the Great Pilgrimage Translating (السنة العاشرة للهجرة) as (tenth century of the Hijrah) may not be the most accurate translation in this context. The term (السنة) typically means (year) in Arabic. The researcher suggests that it would be more accurate to translate (السنة العاشرة للهجرة) as (the tenth year of the Hijrah) to convey the correct historical and chronological meaning. Using (tenth century) would erroneously imply a much longer timespan, which is not the intended message in this context. The Transfer Strategy is evident in the translation of (حجة الوداع) into (Farewell Hajj). This strategy aims to maintain the term's religious significance and historical context while presenting it in a recognizable form for the English-speaking audience. The transfer of (حجة الوداع) as (Farewell Hajj) ensures that the audience grasps the uniqueness and significance of this specific pilgrimage in Islam. Furthermore, the

Paraphrasing Strategy is employed to render (خطبة البلاغ) as the (final sermon.) This transformation retains the essence of the original term while simplifying it for the audience. The choice of (final sermon) aptly conveys the importance and solemnity of the moment when the Prophet delivered his last message to the people during the Farewell Hajj

Example six:

About the Context: In this example, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) delivered his final message to the Muslims during the Farewell Pilgrimage and it was a historic moment in his life. In this sermon, he called for unity and equality among Muslims and emphasized human rights and social justice. He also urged people to abandon the tribalism and ignorance of the pre-Islamic era, condemned usury (riba), and injustice. The Farewell Sermon embodies the fundamental values and principles of Islam and continues to serve as a source of inspiration for Muslims worldwide.

Source Text (ST):

"أيها الناس اسمعوا قولي فإنني لا أدري لعلي لا ألقاكم بعد عامي هذا بهذا الموقف أبداً أيها الناس إن دماءكم و أموالكم عليكم حرام إلى أن تلقوا ربكم كحرمة يومكم هذا و كحرمة شهركم هذا و إنكم ستلقون ربكم فيسألكم عن أعمالكم."

Target Text (TT):

"Oh people, Hear me well! For I know not whether after this year I shall ever be amongst you again. Oh-people your life and your property are deemed sacred till you meet your Lord they just as sacred as this day and month. You will indeed meet your lord and he will most certainly reckon your deeds. Subtitling the above example presents several intricate challenges, primarily rooted in maintaining the religious and moral gravity of the speech while adapting it for an English-speaking audience. Subtitling the expression (دمائكم و أموالكم) presents a challenge due to its deep religious and moral significance, as it refers to the sanctity of human life and property. The paraphrasing strategy is aptly employed here to translate it as (your life and your property). This adaptation simplifies the message while retaining its profound meaning. The effect of this strategy is twofold: it makes the message more accessible to English-speaking audiences unfamiliar with the specific connotations of the original Arabic, and it ensures that the gravity of the message is not lost. By translating it into (your life and your property) the subtitler conveys the values of the message, emphasizing the sacredness of both human life and personal possessions. Using this strategy overcomes the challenge of preserving the

religious and moral depth of the message while making it clear to a broader audience. The expression (و إنكم ستلقون ربكم فيسألکم عن أعمالکم) is translated into (you will indeed meet your lord and he will most certainly reckon your deeds) using expansion strategy to emphasis and certainty. The addition of "indeed" and "most certainly" serve to convey the importance of the message within the English-speaking context. These adverbs enhance the significance of the impending meeting with Allah and the subsequent reckoning of actions. By including (indeed) and (most certainly) the subtitler amplifies the impact of the statement, reinforcing the idea that there is no doubt about the inevitability of this encounter and the accountability for one's actions.

Example Seven:

About the Context: In this scene, the noble companion Bilal ibn Rabah is depicted conveying the instructions given by the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, to the Muslims to follow during the Battle of Badr, which is a significant event in the history of Islam that occurred in the year 624 AD. This battle took place between the Muslims led by Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and the disbelieving army from Mecca. Allah permitted the Muslims to fight against the disbelievers in this battle due to the persecution they had faced in Mecca.

Source Text (ST):

"أيها المهاجرون و الأنصار حافظوا على وصايا النبي في الحرب لا تؤذوا طفلاً أو شيخاً أو امرأة أو مريضاً. لا تقطعوا شجرة لا تحملوا على رجل يتعهد غرسه فاتلوا ظالمكم و سألبي أموالكم."

Target Text (TT):

"Oh, Migrants and Anssar! Observe the rules of as laid out by the Prophet! Do not harm any children, old men, women' or the sick. Don't cut down trees. Do not unjustly inconvenience the man who works in the fields! Fight only your oppressors and those who have stolen from you!"

Subtitling this example involves addressing several challenges to effectively convey the ethical and moral guidelines set by the Prophet during wartime, ensuring clarity and cultural relevance in the target language. Employing the paraphrasing strategy effectively, the expression (لا تؤذوا طفلاً أو شيخاً أو امرأة أو مريضاً) is translated as (Do not harm any children, old men, women, or the sick.), introducing an intra-system shift by transforming singular references into plural. While the source text refers to not harming "any child" and "any woman," etc., the translator uses plurals to maintain readability and naturalness in English. This paraphrasing ensures that the message remains clear and conveys that no harm should be

inflicted on these vulnerable groups. There is another challenge which is translating a somewhat specific Arabic expression (رجل يتعهد غرسه) into English while ensuring that the target audience easily comprehends the message. The translator chooses the paraphrasing strategy to render this expression as (the man who works in the fields.) The paraphrase effectively conveys the essence of the original Arabic expression, which refers to civilian people. While a more literal translation might be "the man who undertakes its planting," this could be less clear and less immediately relatable to English-speaking viewers. The choice of "the man who works in the fields" simplifies the message, ensuring that the audience grasps the intended meaning without needing an explanation or cultural context. In conclusion, subtitling this example effectively navigates the challenges of preserving the source text's moral and ethical content while ensuring readability, cultural relevance, and audience understanding. The use of paraphrasing strategies, including intra-system shift and simplification, enables the subtitles to convey the message clearly and naturally to an English-speaking audience. These strategies not only overcome linguistic disparities but also make the ethical guidelines accessible and relatable in a different cultural context.

Example Eight:

About the Context: In this scene, the Prophetic Statement is evident, which refers to the concept of responsibility and care in Islam. This saying means that every individual in society is responsible for the care and well-being of others, whether they are individuals or the entire community.

The saying encourages providing support and assistance to others and taking care of their rights and needs. This concept is considered a fundamental part of Islamic ethics and contributes to building a connected and cooperative society.

Source Text (ST):

"قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم : كلکم راع و کلکم مسؤول عن رعيته فالإمام راع و هو المسؤول عن رعيته و الرجل راع في أهله و هو المسؤول عن رعيته و المرأة راعية في بيت زوجها و هي المسؤولة عن رعيته و الخادم راع في مال سيده و هو المسؤول عن رعيته فكلکم راع و کلکم مسؤول عن رعيته."

Target Text (TT):

"The Messenger of Allah Peace and Blessings be upon him, said: all of you are shepherds and each one of you is responsible for his flock, A leader of the people is shepherd and is thus responsible for his flock. Aman is like the shepherd of his family, and he is responsible for his flock. A woman is like the shepherd of her husband's house and children, and she is responsible for them. A Servant is

guardian of his master's property and is thus responsible for it. So, all of you are shepherds and are thus responsible for your charges."

There is a challenge in subtitling the Arabic expression (الإمام) into English as finding an appropriate and culturally relevant equivalent is not an easy task. The term (الإمام) can have several connotations in Arabic, including (leader) or (guide) especially in a religious context. Choosing the right translation is crucial to accurately convey the intended meaning to the English-speaking audience. In this context, the translator opted for the expansion strategy by translating (الإمام) as (A leader of the people). This expansion provides a direct translation and adds additional context for English readers who may not be familiar with the specific role and responsibilities associated with an (imam) in an Islamic context. It clarifies that the (imam) in Islamic culture refer to someone who leads and guides a group of people such as a teacher. The translator used expansion strategy to overcome the challenge of translating (الإمام) in this context as it helps bridge the cultural gap between Arabic and English languages and transfer the meaning clearly to the English-speaking audience. It also confirms the responsibility, which is a central idea in the source text. Finally, the translator overcame the challenge in subtitling (الإمام) by using the expansion strategy, resulting in the translation (A leader of the people.)

Example Nine:

About the Context: After the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina, which was marked by immense hardships and challenges, as the Prophet and his follower's faced persecution and danger in Mecca. In contrast, they were greeted with a heartfelt and warm reception when they arrived in Medina. The people of Medina, known as the Ansar, welcomed the Prophet and his companions with open arms, displaying remarkable hospitality and camaraderie. This generous reception was a testament to the Ansar's deep faith and belief in the Prophet's mission.

Source Text (ST):

رجل من الأنصار: مرحبًا برسول الله بمدينته المنورة.

Target Text (TT):

Ansari man: Welcome Oh Messenger of Allah to his city of light.

Explanation: The challenge in this example is accurately conveying the meaning of (مدينته المنورة). The use of (his city of light) suggests that the city belongs to the Prophet, which may not be the intended meaning. The use of the transfer strategy

(city of light) might not fully capture the specific reference to the city of Madinah (Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah), which is a well-known place in Islamic history and carries a specific connotation. It might be more suitable to use a transliteration like "Madinah Al-Munawwarah" to retain the cultural and historical significance of the city while making it understandable to an English-speaking audience. The researcher suggests using expansion, paraphrasing, and imitation strategies to translate this expression accurately, wherein the translation would become as follows: (Welcome Oh Messenger of Allah to your city Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah).

Example Ten:

About the Context: During the early days of Islam in Mecca, the Prophet Muhammad and his followers faced intense pressure and persecution from the polytheistic leaders of the city. To protect themselves and the nascent Islamic community, the practice of Islam was kept secret. However, a significant turning point occurred when Allah, the Almighty, commanded the Muslims to openly declare their faith. In response to this divine command, the Muslim community courageously emerged in the heart of Mecca, proclaiming with loud voices, "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." This bold declaration marked a momentous shift in the history of Islam, as it transitioned from secrecy to public proclamation, despite the ongoing challenges and opposition faced by the early Muslims in Mecca.

Source Text (ST):

المسلمون: لا إله إلا الله محمدًا رسول الله, الله أكبر الله أكبر.

Target Text (TT):

Muslims: There are No another Gods but God.

Allah is the greatest! Allah is the greatest!

The translator's use of the transfer strategy in translating (الله) into (God) poses a challenge in accurately conveying the intended meaning, especially in the context of this film where disbelievers believe in the existence of multiple gods, while Islam emphasizes the belief in the one and only Allah. Using (God) as a translation for (الله), can potentially lead to confusion or misinterpretation. To address this challenge, the researcher suggests using the imitation strategy to make the translation more appropriate. Translating it as (There is no God but Allah) retains the original Arabic term "Allah," which is essential in Islamic belief while conveying the concept of monotheism. This strategy preserves both the linguistic and cultural differences of the

source text and ensures that the audience grasps the distinct Islamic monotheistic belief while watching the film.

5 Conclusion

The study aims at investigating the challenges that faced the subtitler during subtitling the religious expressions in *The Message* Film into English. It was noted after the in-depth analysis that the subtitler managed to overcome most of the challenges encountered during the translation process using the appropriate translation strategy for the context of each of the religious expressions mentioned in the film. This study showed that it is very important to consider the audience in translating religious content.

The analysis revealed that the subtitler was successful in effectively translating the religious expressions. The nuanced strategies applied, such as the use of transfer, expansion, and taming strategies, showcased the subtitler's adeptness in navigating the linguistic and cultural challenges inherent in translating religious content. Despite the inevitable complexities, the subtitler managed to preserve the essence of the Arabic source text within the constraints of English subtitles, ensuring that the spiritual and cultural messages were conveyed to an English-speaking audience. This has been shown clearly in the translation of the term "الله." Additionally, the subtitle's use of an expansion strategy to translate "المحصنات" as "pure women" aimed to capture the source text's essence.

References

- Al-Adwan, A. (2015). Ideological manipulation in audiovisual translation: A case study of the translation of Islamic culture in *The Message*. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature*, 4(1), 223–231. [CrossRef]
- Aldualimi, A., & Almahasees, Z. (2022). A quantitative analysis of the reactions of viewers to the subtitling of the Arabic version of Ar Risalah's movie "The Message" in English. *Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University*, 57(6), 1053–1063. [CrossRef]
- Al-Hejin, B. (2020). The role of paratexts in the reception of religious films: Subtitling and explanatory notes. *Translation and Interpreting Studies*, 15(2), 251–269. [CrossRef]
- Chiaro, D. (2009). *Issues in audiovisual translation*. In M. Baker & G. Saldanha (Eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (2nd ed., pp. 141–145). Routledge.
- Chiaro, D. (2009). *The language of jokes: Analyzing verbal play*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Davies, M. (2004). *Undergraduate and postgraduate translation degrees*. In K. Malmkjær (Ed.), *Translation in undergraduate degree programmes* (pp. 67–82). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Delabastita, D. (1989). Translation and mass-communication: Film- and T.V.-translation as evidence of cultural dynamics. *Babel*, 35(4), 193–218. [CrossRef]
- Díaz Cintas, J. (2003). *Audiovisual translation in the third millennium*. In G. Anderman & M. Rogers (Eds.), *Translation today: Trends and perspectives* (pp. 192–204). Toronto & Sydney: Multilingual Matters.
- Díaz Cintas, J. (2007). *Audiovisual translation scenarios*. Retrieved March 2, 2024, from http://www.translationconcepts.org/pdf/AVT_Presentation.pdf
- Díaz Cintas, J. (2010). *Introduction: Audiovisual translation – An overview of its potential*. In J. Díaz Cintas (Ed.), *New trends in audiovisual translation* (pp. 1–18). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Díaz Cintas, J., & Anderman, G. (2009). *Audiovisual translation: Language transfer on screen*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Díaz Cintas, J., & Remael, A. (2007). *Audiovisual translation: Subtitling*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Faiq, S. (2007). *Trans-lating the sacred: The politics of sacred texts*. Multilingual Matters.
- Gambier, Y. (2003). Introduction. *The Translator*, 9(2), 171–189. [CrossRef]
- Gambier, Y. (2009). *Perception and reception of audiovisual translation: Implications and challenges*. In H. C. Omar, H. Haroon, & A. A. Ghani (Eds.), *The sustainability of the translation field* (pp. 40–57). Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Translators Association.
- Ghaemi, F., & Benyamin, J. (2010). Strategies used in the translation of interlingual subtitles. *Journal of English Studies*, 1(1), 39–49.
- Gottlieb, H. (1992). *Subtitling: A new university discipline*. In C. Dollerup & A. Loddegaard (Eds.), *Teaching translation and interpreting: Training, talent, and experience* (pp. 161–170). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Gottlieb, H. (1994). *Subtitling: A people translating people*. In C. Dollerup & A. Lindegaard (Eds.), *Teaching translation and interpreting 2: Insights, aims, visions* (pp. 261–274). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Ivarsson, J. (2003). *A handbook of an art: Subtitling for the media*. Stockholm, Sweden: Transedit.

- Karamitroglou, F. (2000). *Towards a methodology for the investigation of norms in audiovisual translation*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi.
- Neves, J. (2005a). Subtitling: A brief overview. *Journal of Translation Studies*, 8(1), 49–54.
- Neves, J. (2005b). *The role of subtitles in audiovisual translation* [Master's thesis, Universidade Católica Portuguesa]. <http://hdl.handle.net/10400.14/5343>
- Pedersen, J. (2010). Audiovisual translation—In general and in Scandinavia. *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, 18(1), 1–22. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Piaget, J. (1972). Intellectual evolution from adolescence to adulthood (J. Bliss & H. Furth, Trans.). *Human Development*, 15(1), 1–12. [[CrossRef](#)]