

Translating Swear Words in *Pulp Fiction*:
A Comparative Case Study in DVD
Subtitles and Internet Fansubs

By

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Abstract

Due to the prevalence of swearing in popular films such as some of those produced in Hollywood, it is a linguistic phenomenon that causes significant issues in cross-cultural adaptation when these films are translated for contexts where swearing is further from the norm, and is considered taboo. In line with this, the present study sets out to investigate two main research questions: (1) What are the translation strategies employed in rendering swear words into Arabic in the context of subtitles? (2) Are there any significant differences between the subtitles by professionals and by fans in terms of the strategies used?

This study takes the film *Pulp Fiction* (1994), directed and written by Quentin Tarantino, as a case study. The data of the corpus is drawn from two versions of the film translation, namely the official DVD subtitles and the internet subtitles created by fans (fansubs). A quantitative analysis was carried out to identify the distributions and frequency of each instance of swear words and the translation strategies used in the official DVD subtitles and the internet fansubs, and to determine whether there are significant differences between these two subtitled versions or not. Based on the quantitative results, a qualitative analysis is provided. The results show that around two-thirds of English swear words have been omitted in both subtitled versions, although the words chosen in the fansub version tend to be harsher than those in the official DVD version.

Keywords: swear words, *Pulp Fiction*, subtitling, audiovisual translation, internet fansubs, official DVD subtitles, English-Arabic subtitling.

Statement of candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “Translating swear words in Pulp Fiction: A comparative case study in DVD subtitles and internet fansubs” has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University. I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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24th April 2017

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

Swearing is a linguistic phenomenon that exists in almost every language and culture at least to some extent. The degree to which swearing is used among people is different. Some people swear very often, while some consider swearing as a taboo and disrespectful act. However, swearing is an indispensable part of language, and everyone swears although some may claim otherwise. The importance of swearing stems from its extensive usage to express different feelings ranging from pain to stress, annoyance, frustrations and joy. Swearing is an element of language that is full of emotions and at the same time belongs to taboo areas. Its power lies in the fact that it is a successful and efficient tool for insulting, amusing, shocking and persuading people.

For many years, the topic of swearing has received only scant attention in academic research. McEnery and Xiao (2004) mentioned that although swearing is used on a daily basis, it has not been covered in many academic studies. According to Beers Fägersten (2012), in informal settings, swearing represents an astonishing 0.14% to 12.7% of English conversation. The lack of studies on swearing is likely due to the nature of swearing, as it is a very sensitive topic in many cultures and that is even more true in some conservative cultures such as Arabic ones. Hughes (1991) notes that swearing is a controversial and sensitive issue and people tend not to accept swearing as a topic to be discussed publicly. Wajnryb (2005, p.1-2) also criticises the lack of studies on swearing and how in view of its importance in language. She condemns a

large amount of literature devoted to the final “-s” in third-person singular verbs in English, for instance, compared to the attention paid to swearing. This is not to say that swearing has not been studied at all, simply that the volume of studies on the topic is surprisingly small. Some notable studies on swearing include those by Montagu (1967), Andersson and Trudgill (1990), Hughes (1998), Jay (2000), Beers Fägersten (2000), Bayard & Krishnayya (2001), Wajnryb (2005), Allan and Burrage (2006), McEnery (2006) and Ljung (2011) who have conducted significant studies on swearing and bad language in general.

Furthermore, swear words occur more frequently now than in the past, particularly in Hollywood films, as language norms in the media have shifted significantly in the last decades (Cressman, Callister et al. 2009). That does not necessarily mean people swear more at present than in the past, but it may mean that swearing became less taboo in the media over time. Moreover, it is an undeniable fact that films play a crucial role in shaping and reshaping thoughts and establishing cultural exchange and diffusion. However, when such films are subtitled from an open and liberal culture such as American culture to conservative cultures such as Arabic, several cultural differences will emerge. One of these differences relates to the fact that swearing is considered by many as taboo. The use and manner of swearing varies significantly among cultures, and what can be acceptable in one culture might be very offensive to others. These variations between languages and cultures regarding swearing constitute a thorny challenge for Arabic subtitlers of American films. All these reasons have accumulated to form the motivation for this study.

1.2 The aim of the study

In view of the discussion above, the aim of the present study was to use a case study to investigate how swear words are translated into Arabic. In particular, the study is aimed at analysing the strategies that are employed in professional DVD subtitles (henceforth prosubs) and subtitles created by fans (henceforth fansubs) of the film *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino,1994)¹ into Arabic to determine whether there are any significant differences between the two forms of subtitling. The two Arabic versions of the subtitles of *Pulp Fiction* are compared and analysed to identify the most common strategies used in both versions for rendering English swear words into Arabic.

1.3 The significance of the current study

From the preliminary literature review, it is evident that there is a lack of studies on the translation of swearing in general and in the English–Arabic language pair in particular. As far as the subtitling of swear words into Arabic is concerned, there are only a couple of studies that dealt with this topic. To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, this is the first study to compare the subtitling of swear words in the prosubs and fansubs in Arabic to identify the strategies used.

To address the gap, the current research study will use a quantitative as well as qualitative approach. Firstly, the instances of swearing will be identified in the film. A subsequent quantitative analysis will be conducted to present the frequency and the distribution of swear words in the film, and the two subtitled versions. This will be

¹ The rest of this study you will simply use the title *Pulp Fiction* to refer to the 1994 film by Quentin Tarantino.

followed by a qualitative analysis which aims to explain how swearing is subtitled in the prosub and fansub version and to provide possible interpretations for such choices.

1.4 The structure of the current study

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents a review of the pertinent literature. This chapter contains two main parts, firstly focusing on the concept of swearing. This includes a presentation of different definitions of swearing found in previous studies as well as the various functions and classifications of swear words. This culminates in a detailed account of the classification and the definition adopted in this study. The second part revolves around audiovisual translation with particular emphasis on subtitling, its types and constraints followed by a brief overview of how the subtitles created by professional subtitlers (henceforth prosubbers) and fans (fansubbers) are different from each other. This part also discusses subtitling strategies and a general overview of two concepts proposed by Toury (1995), namely Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) and translation norms.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed account of the methodology applied in this study. First, it starts with the reasons for selecting *Pulp Fiction* as case study and its significance in Hollywood. The chapter then provides an account of how the data of this study is collected, followed by a description of the methods adopted to address the research questions of the study.

Chapter 4 presents the main findings and a discussion of the quantitative and qualitative results. The first part of this chapter presents an evaluation of the quantitative analysis, which includes the distribution, and the frequency of swear words in the film and the two subtitled versions. In the second part, the qualitative analysis of the subtitling of

swear words in the two subtitled versions of *Pulp Fiction* is presented according to functions of swearing, namely, expletive, abusive, humorous, and auxiliary swearing.

Chapter 5 concludes the study. It presents an overview of the main findings and concludes with possible avenues for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Defining Swearing

Swearing may be a natural and pervasive part of language, but due to the fact that there are widely divergent language norms regarding swearing in different cultures, it is important to arrive at a working definition for the purposes of this study. From previous studies such as Montagu (1967), Andersson and Trudgill (1990), Hughes (1998), Mateo and Yus (2000), Jay (2000), Wajnryb (2005), Allan and Burridge (2006), and Ljung (2011), it is clear that the definitions of swear words vary in the literature and that there is some terminological confusion. According to Wajnryb, there are two reasons for confusion about the study of taboo language. The first one concerns the word that normally “constitutes” swearing while the second one concerns how we “refer” to swearing (2005,p.15).

This confusion appears to be due to the fact that “there are more swearing functions to perform than there are swear words to use” (Wajnryb, 2005, p. 15). This means that there are a greater number of circumstances in which the same swear words might be used in different contexts and therefore take on a different meaning. The second factor is related to the meta-language of swearing. Therefore, many words such as “expletive”, “swearing”, “cursing”, “profanity” and “foul language” are seen as synonyms and they are used in general to refer to the same concept. For example, “swearing” is used in British English while “cursing” is used in American English. This means that different terms and labels are attached to the same concept.

Montagu attempts to differentiate between the terms “cursing” and “swearing,” and provides several examples of various forms of swearing used in different cultures. He indicates that it is challenging to provide a clear-cut definition of these terms, but it could be said that “cursing is a form of swearing and that swearing is a form of cursing”. He adds that “it is strictly more accurate to consider swearing as the generic form and cursing as a species of it” (1967, p. 35).

In the same vein, Kidman (1993) criticizes the lack of good and concise definitions of “swearing” and its synonyms in the academic studies which made the researcher categorize swearing based entirely on the lexical item used. Similarly, Ljung (as cited in Karjalainen, 2002) indicates that it is challenging and complicated to give an exact definition of the concept of swearing but it is relatively easy to identify instances of swearing. Although there are several definitions of swear words and their synonyms, it is beyond the scope of this study to include all definitions of swearing. Consequently, for the purposes of this study, the terms swearing, swear word, bad language, cursing, taboo language and obscene words are used interchangeably. Also, the words profanity and blasphemy will be used synonymously as both relate to the abuse of sacred concepts. Hence, we can avoid any confusion or the repetitive use of certain terms. The same approach has been adopted by researchers such as Ghassempur (2009) and McEnery (2006). McEnery calls all types of swear words “bad language” and he defines this as “any word or phrase which, when used in what one might call polite conversation, is likely to cause offense. Swearing is one example of bad language, blasphemous, homophobic, racist and sexist language may also cause offence in modern England” (McEnery, 2006, p.2).

Allan and Burridge (2006) note that taboos are seen differently because of cultural, religious and social factors. In other words, some expressions might be acceptable in a given culture, taboo, and offensive in another culture. The degree of offensiveness depends mainly on the community's values and consequently it cannot have the same effect when the swearing is translated into other languages and cultures. However, there are some subjects which are considered taboo across cultures. Baker indicates that "sex, religion, and defecation are taboo subjects in many societies" (2011, p. 245).

Almost all definitions of bad language that have been proposed by linguists have three elements in common. The first one is that the taboo words should not be interpreted literally. Second, the words refer to taboo objects and lastly, those words are used to release emotions. In view of the previous discussion, this study will use the general definition of expletives proposed by Stenström(2011).According to him, "Expletives are realized by taboo words related to religion, sex and the human body, which are used figuratively and express the speaker's (genuine or pretended) emotions and attitudes." (Stenström 2011, p.240).

Having defined swearing for this study, it is now important to look at the different functions and classifications of swear words.

2.2 Swearing: functions and classifications

Each dirty word by nature is a multidimensional concept varying along dimensions such as: semantic meaning, degree of offensiveness, frequency of usage, social-physical constraint, and some idiosyncratic variables applied to each word as a function of each individual's experience with the word. [...] The ultimate decision of

the dirtiness of words relies on the communication context itself, i.e., the speaker, the listener, the socialphysical setting, and the topic of discussion (Jay, 1977, p.235).

As stressed in the above quote, context is all-important in determining the function and intensity of a swear word. A number of variables must be taken into account when we evaluate the extent to which swearing is taboo. The variables can be the context in which the swear word is uttered, the status of the speakers and listeners, and their relationship. All of these factors can determine whether the swearing is meant to be offensive and insulting, or whether it is used for another purpose. In his dictionary titled *the F-word*, lexicographer Jesse Sheidlower (1999), as cited in Ghassempur (2009), considers only one word in the entire dictionary: *Fuck* and all its forms and functions. He points out that a swear word can be used to express a wide range of feelings and emotions and thus the context in which the word is uttered will determine the meaning and intention. Therefore, the present study will deal only with the actual function of swear words that occur in certain contexts. It is indicated in Stenström (1992), Mateo and Yus (2000), Wajnryb (2005), and Pinker (2007) that swear words serve particular purposes and cannot simply be confined to degrees of offensiveness in respect to the semantic fields to which they belong.

Many different ways of classifying swearing have been proposed. Some focus on the pragmatic effect of swearing (see, e.g., Jay, 2000; Mateo and Yus, 2000; and Wajnryb, 2005), some are particularly focused on morphosyntax (e.g. McEnery, 2006). Some focus mainly on the semantics of swearing (e.g. Pinker, 2007; and Ljung, 2011) and others involve the participation framework in some way (e.g. Stenström, 1992). However, in this study, the framework that is used derives from Andersson and Trudgil (1990). They provide us with a very comprehensive typology that takes the

contextualization of swearing into account and examines when and why people swear. They divide the functions of swearing into four pragmatic categories: expletive, abusive, humorous and auxiliary (1990, p.61). In the following paragraphs, an account of these types of swearing will be provided.

Expletive swearing is used to express the speakers' emotions. This type of swearing does not require a target or an addressee. Its primary purpose is to release negative emotions such as pain or frustration and it is usually a sudden and spontaneous outburst in reaction to something unpleasant or an unexpected occurrence. For instance, if you spilled a cup of coffee over your jacket, you may shout *shit!* or *damn it!*

On the other hand, **abusive swearing** is directed at people and is intended to insult and inflict hurt on others. It is derogatory and involves name-calling and different kinds of cursing. It is used to express hateful feelings towards someone. For example, "*You bastard! Go to hell!*" (Andersson and Trudgill, 1990, p. 61, their emphasis).

Humorous swearing appears to be abusive swearing but its function is completely different. Humorous swearing is not intended to be derogatory or abusive and this type of swearing uses the words in a playful manner rather than to insult others. For instance, "*Get your ass in gear!*" (Andersson and Trudgill, 1990, p.61, their emphasis).

Auxiliary swearing does not require an addressee and is often used between friends or in relaxed settings. This type of swearing tends to include non-insistent, shocked and enthusiastic utterances and does not carry any negative tone. Andersson and Trudgill (1990, p. 61) call auxiliary swearing, "lazy swearing" because it does not carry any meaning. This means certain words which need more effort to formulate, might be replaced by some swear words such as "fucking" or "shit". For example in the

sentence, “I have a lot of shit to get done”, the word *shit* replaces the word things or work.

Having discussed the terminology and the classification of swear words, attention will now shift to the context of audiovisual translation as well as the role of swearing in film.

2.3 Audiovisual translation: A brief introduction

The advent of the digital revolution has brought nations closer together, allowing cultural exchanges and cultural representations to take place. Such rapid development has removed the physical borders between nations, turning the world into a global village. This huge expansion has increased the demand for AVT to take its place as an essential player in the communication and cultural exchange between nations. Through AVT, the exchange of cultures is established more effectively than by any other form of translation, particularly in the Arabic world where people tend to spend more time watching AV products rather than participating in other activities, such as reading.

AVT was recognised as an academic field "at the end of last century". It is considered as one of the most popular modes of translation used in the marketplace today, thanks to DVDs, movies, TV shows, video clips, YouTube videos, mobiles and other social media applications. Furthermore, most of the available AV products are in English, which has increased the demand for AVT to meet the needs of foreign audiences. Baker notes that the increasing demand for AVT has given AVT priority in becoming a dynamic field in translation studies (2001).

2.4 Subtitling and its constraints

Voiceover, dubbing and subtitling are the three most prominent modes of AVT, at least in the context of interlingual translation. Voiceover refers to a process where the volume of the original speaker is lowered to such an extent that the original voice cannot be heard, which allows a narrator to read the translation and interpret what the original speaker says (Gottlieb, 2001: 244). Dubbing refers to the replacement of the original sounds with the target language version, which follows as closely as possible the timing, phrasing, and lip movement (Luyken & Herbst, 1991p. 31). The third mode, subtitling, has been defined by Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007, p. 8) as: "...a translation practice that consists of presenting a written text, generally on the lower part of the screen, that endeavors to recount the original dialogue of the speakers, as well as the discursive elements that appear in the image (letters, inserts), and the information that is contained on the soundtrack (songs, voices off)". As subtitling is the main topic of the study, the following sections will be dedicated to subtitling, its types and its constraints.

There are some unique features that make subtitles different from any other types of translation. Unlike the translation of books, subtitles have some linguistic and technical limitations that must be taken into account when subtitling films to achieve successful communication. Gottlieb (2001) states that there are four different channels in subtitling that the audience of the AV material deal with simultaneously. The first is the visual-auditory channel, such as "dialogue, background voices, and sometimes lyrics"; the second is the non-verbal-auditory channel which might consist of "music, natural sound, and sound effects." The third channel is verbal-visual which might include "superimposed titles and written signs on the screen." The last channel is the

non-verbal visual comprising picture composition and flow (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 245). The channels mentioned above are of great importance for subtitlers in achieving good communication. Kruger explains the uniqueness of subtitling as follows:

The difference between the skills required for subtitling and those required for translation, editing or interpreting, lies in the very technical aspects of subtitling. Subtitling requires all the skills that other modes require in terms of text analysis, subject expertise, language, awareness of context, quality control and so forth, but it also requires that the subtitler be able to apply these skills within very rigid constraints of time and space, while adhering to specific conventions of quantity and form. Mastering and applying these skills take a long time (Kruger, 2008, p. 82).

Other technical challenges that face subtitlers when translating the source text lie in the space and time constraints. Several AVT experts such as Delabastita (1989) and Schwarz (2002) note that subtitlers have to deal with three technical constraints, namely the spatial parameter of the screen, the number of lines given and the number of characters allowed per line. Such limitations are difficult challenges for subtitlers who are required to reduce the words, while also avoiding unnecessary semantic load to meet the conditions mentioned above.

2.5 Subtitle Types:

One of the main classifications of subtitling is based on linguistic points of view, in which subtitling can be either intralingual, interlingual or bilingual (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007). Intralingual refers to a subtitle in which spoken language is made visible as written language; the subtitles in this type are still in the same language as

the soundtrack. This format has become more popular in the media recently because of the digital revolution and is primarily used for deaf people or those who are hard of hearing. Another main function of the intralingual subtitle is for educational purposes, particularly as a tool for learning a second language, and as support for second language users.

A bilingual subtitle is a form of subtitling which is used in countries where two official languages are spoken. For example, in Belgium, films are normally presented with both Flemish and French subtitles appearing concurrently at the bottom of the screen. Ivarsson and Carrol explain that “subtitling a film simultaneously in two languages has been a standard practice for many years in bilingual countries such as Finland and Belgium” (1998, p.28). The mode is also used in Hong Kong and mainland China. Furthermore, bilingual subtitling is sometimes used at film festivals.

The third type is interlingual subtitling which is also called translation subtitling and includes linguistic transfer from one language to another. Luyken and Herbst (1991, p. 31) calls this type of subtitling “diagonal subtitling” because it involves both a change from one language into another and a shift from oral to written language. In other words, interlingual subtitling consists of changes in both the language and the mode, and is used in making AV materials available for the foreign audience. Interlingual subtitling can also be used as a tool for learning a second language. Interlingual subtitling normally occurs from a foreign language into the language of the audience. If the subtitles are in the foreign language and the dialogue in the language of the audience, it is called reversed subtitling.

There is another classification of subtitles that is based on technical qualities, in which subtitles can be shown as either open subtitling or closed subtitling (Gottlieb, 1992,

p.163). In open subtitling, subtitles are fixed and cannot be removed from the original film or program, while closed subtitling gives viewers the option to watch the AV material either with or without the subtitles by selecting an option on DVD or by means of a decoder.

2.6 Fansubbing:

According to Diaz Cintas & Muñoz (2006, p.1), fansubbing originated as a “fan-produced, translated, subtitled version of a Japanese anime program”. The term “fansubbing” is generally understood to mean any subtitling produced by fans and distributed on the internet on a non-profit basis. According to a definition provided by Fernández-Costales (2012), fansubbing is the practice of subtitling carried out by fans for fans. This form has gained tremendous ground in recent years and is now a widespread phenomenon across the globe.

Fansubbing has some unique features. Fansubs, in general, treat the practice of subtitling as a hobby, not as a way to make a profit (Luczaj, Holy-Luczaj, & Cwiek-Rogalska, 2014). Fansubbing is often available within a short time of the release of a film, allowing the target audience to gain access to the film instead of waiting for the official subtitles to be released.

Alkadi (2010) indicates that there are many companies in the Arabic world which illegally subtitle films, then sell them on the market. This makes fansubbing the first and preferred choice, regardless of whether it is legal or not. Another interesting feature of fansubbing is that it tends to use source-oriented subtitles which preserve the peculiarities and the authenticity of the source text. This might be ascribed to the absence of formal censorship and the anonymous identities of fansubbers. Diaz-Cintas

(2005) and Costales (2012) state that fansubs tend to provide more creative solutions than are found in professional subtitles. Dwyer states that “these distinctive characteristics have led many to conclude that fansubbing offers valuable lessons for professionals, not least in providing a vision of how to preserve creativity and authenticity in the face of technological change and the demands of a decentralized global mediasphere” (2012,p.219).

2.7 Differences between conventional subtitles and fansubs

The following table shows a comparison between official subtitles and fansubs.

Characteristics	Fansubs	Official DVDs
Providing the dialogue	No. Dialogue is extracted from the audio or taken from the original transcript.	The studio provides it.
Access to the video files	No.	It depends on the client.
Restrictions on character numbers	No.	Yes.
Freedom of typography	Yes. Different fonts and colours for each character can be used.	No. The standard font used for the studies is Arial or Times New Roman 12pt (Diaz Cintas, 2001: 114).
Is the translator responsible for adaptation	No.	Yes.
Correction and proofreading	Not always.	There should be, but most studios ignore this stage due to the cost (Diaz Cintas, 2001).
The subtitles are recorded on video	Usually not; the subtitles are in a separate file.	Yes.
Quality assurance	Not always.	Yes.
Deadline on subtitling	No, although fansubbers try to make the translation available as soon as possible.	Yes.
Distribution channel	Through the internet.	Through official distributors.
Identity of translator	Yes. The username, nicknames, and in some cases the real name appear at the end of the film.	Not always, although the name of the translator is recorded with the official distributor.

Figure 1: A comparison of official subtitles and fansubs. Adapted from Manchón (2013); based on Martinez's classification (2010).

2.8 Audiovisual Translation in Arabic Context

In Arabic context, researchers such as Darwish (2009), Maluf (2005), Mazid (2006), Gamal (2007, 2008a; 2013b; 2014), Yacoub (2010), Athamneh and Zitawi (1999), Zitawi (1995, 2003; 2004; 2008), Alkadi (2010), Altahri (2013), Yahiaoui (2014), Khuddro (2000, 2009; 2016), Al-Adwan (2009,2015), and (Eldalees, Al-Adwan, & Yahiaoui, 2017) have paved the way to the study of audiovisual translation. Nevertheless, the translation of swear words into Arabic in subtitles remains largely untouched. The following section will discuss some previous studies which dealt with swearing in different languages, Arabic included.

2.9 Previous Case Studies on Translation of Swear words

Little has been written about the translation into different languages of swear words used in different genres. In literary genres, only a few studies discuss the translation of swearing. This section will present a general discussion on the translation of swearing, first in the literary genre and then in AVT context.

In the literary genre, some studies deal with the translation of taboo language into different European languages. One of these studies is that by Sidiropoulou (1998) who compares the translations of swear words in three different genres: prose, news reports, and theater into Greek. Another comparison by Karjalainen (2002) explores swear words translation in two Swedish translations of the work entitled *The Catcher in the Rye*. His study is based mainly on a quantitative approach and he found that almost half of the swearing expressions have been eliminated in both translated versions. In the context of Polish, Kizeweter (2005) examines the occurrence of the word *fuck* in English contemporary fiction and its translation into Polish.

Furthermore, Greenall (2008) investigates the translation of swear words in *The Commitments* (Roddy Doyle, 1987) into Norwegian, in both the translated novel and the subtitled movie version of *The Commitments*. Surprisingly, he notes that the number of swear words in the translated novel is larger than in that of the subtitled film. According to him, AVT constraints can be the primary reason for reducing the instances of swear words in the subtitled Norwegian film.

In German context, Horton (1998) examines the translation of swear words in three of Roddy Doyle's novels: *The Commitments* (1987), *The Snapper* (1990), and *The Van* (1991). Ghassempur (2009) also compares two translations of *The Commitments* (Roddy Doyle, 1987) to find how the functions of swearing are rendered into German. She studies the topic from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives to identify the frequencies and distribution of taboo language in the two translations, and to identify translators' translational patterns and how both translators deal with swear words and their functions. Both researchers conclude that the absence of the equivalent for the word *fuck* presents a big challenge for translators and they found that the number of expletives in the German translations is less than the source text.

Teperi (2015) takes Stephen Fry's autobiography *Moab Is My Washpot* as a case study to explore the reasons why swear words are omitted in the Finnish version and explains how the translator deals with unusual taboo expressions that have been invented by the author. An interview with the translator is conducted to give some explanations for her choices.

In the context of Audiovisual translation, a number of studies have dealt with dubbing and subtitling of taboo language into different languages, mainly into Spanish. Maria Fernández (2006), in her contrastive study, investigates the dubbing of swear words in

a film *South Park* (Parker, 1999) into Spanish. She condemns the foreignising strategy that was applied and that consequently resulted in an unidiomatic translation which contains many colloquial forms borrowed from the English language. Similarly, Fernández Dobao (2006) explores swearing behaviours and how they are different in English and Spanish. She takes the film *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994) as a case study and touches upon the linguistic and cultural aspects that led to the absence of the correct swearing equivalents between English and Spanish. She proposes compensation as translation strategy when there is no semantic or stylistic equivalent.

In the context of dubbing, Pujol (2006) conducts a systematic analysis of dubbing *fuck* and its compounds and derivatives into Catalan. Instances of swearing are taken from the film *Dusk till Dawn* (Rodríguez1, 1996). In his study, he takes a quantitative approach and indicates that omission is the most prevalent strategy used in the dubbing of swearing and most of the swear words in the Catalan version, to a great extent, belong to sex and scatology.

In Pardo's (2011) doctoral thesis, she explores how swear words are dubbed from English into Spanish. In her comparative study, the English swear words were taken from eight films that were either written or directed by Quentin Tarantino. The hypothesis of the study was that English swear words are eliminated when dubbed into Spanish. She classified swear words into sex, scatology, body organs and functions, religion, incest, prostitution, racism, insults related to physical and mentally disabled, animal related insults and cross-categorized insults. She found that sex-related insults are the most prevalent type of swear words that occur in the English version. It is indicated that more than half of the swearing expressions were censored when dubbed into Spanish. Similarly, Ávila-Cabrera (2014), in his doctoral study, investigates the

manner in which offensive language is subtitled into Spanish. He employs Descriptive Translation Studies ²as a theoretical framework to find out to what extent the subtitled versions match the original dialogue. From a comparison of three films written and directed by Quentin Tarantino, namely *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), it is found that subtitled versions tend to contain more swear words over time, which means the attitude of the target language towards swear words has changed and become more permissive. He examines the technical limitations in subtitles and how these restrictions might affect the way offensive language is translated. He concludes his study by asserting that the removal of swear words for technical reasons should seek to expose the target audience to the same feelings and emotions as those evoked by the original dialogue.

Still discussing subtitling of swearing in Spanish context, Manchón (2013), in his corpus study, analyses the translation of swear words in prosubs and fansubs into Spanish, uncovering the lexical density of swear words in both versions. The focus of the study is to examine the proportion of swear words kept in the prosubs and fansubs, followed by a qualitative analysis to discover the effect that each version might have on the target audience. It is found that fansubs contain more swear words than are found in prosubs.

Another corpus-based study conducted by Lie (2013) explores the translation of obscene words from English into Norwegian in 15 films. The Norwegian subtitles are compared with the original dialogue to observe and quantify semantic, syntactic and functional differences and discrepancies. He notes that the Norwegian subtitles differ significantly from the original text regarding syntactic and semantic features of swear

² See section 2.12 for more details about Descriptive Translation Studies.

words. It is indicated in this study that around 30 per cent of English taboo expressions were eliminated. Such a huge reduction and the discrepancies found can be explained by the lack of idiomatic equivalents in the Norwegian language.

Chen (2004) investigates the translation of swearing in American English into Putonghua. He indicates that most of the swear words in American movies are omitted or under-translated when subtitling American swear words into Putonghua. This is due to ideological and cultural reasons in addition to censorship in Hong Kong. Similarly, Han & Wang (2014) investigate the subtitling of English swear words into Chinese in an Australian reality TV series called *The Family* (2011). In their corpus-based study, they examine the extent to which the functions of English swear words have been successfully rendered in the Chinese version and determine the frequency of swear words in the original text and subtitled version. The results show that the subtitled version is quite different from the original, concerning the number of semantic categories, the frequency of swear words and the various functions of swear words. Even though the translator opts for toning down the force of swearing expressions, he/she succeeds in achieving the communicative purpose between the original episodes and the target-language audience.

Nguyen (2015) examines the subtitles of swear words in one of Quentin Tarantino's films - *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) - in the Dutch language. In her contrastive study, Nguyen quantitatively investigates the strategies employed for reading swearing into Dutch, followed by a qualitative analysis to identify whether the linguistic functions of swear words have been preserved. She adopted a semantic and pragmatic typology for swearing in her study to explore the impact of target language and culture on the cross-cultural transfer of taboo language, particularly in an AVT context. It is indicated in

the study that taboo language tends to be toned down during translation as American and Dutch cultures are different and thus swearing makes Dutch audiences uncomfortable.

Into Arabic, the concept of swearing has not been fully explored, only very few studies briefly addressed translation of swearing. In subtitling contexts, Alkadi (2010), in his doctoral study, shed light on the problems of subtitling swear words along with two other issues, namely dialect and humour. In discussing swearing, he investigates the technical, linguistic and cultural problems faced when subtitling taboo expressions into Arabic. He takes a film entitled *London to Brighton* (Williams, 2006) as a case study. Interviews with professional subtitlers were conducted to find out how they translate, what are the problems faced and what solutions might be suggested for them. He attempts to evaluate the attitudes and the perception of Arabic recipients toward swear words. However, the results cannot be generalized as the Arabic participants are in the UK which means that attitudes toward swear words may vary significantly; it assumed that Arabs living in Western countries might be more permissive than their counterparts in Arabic countries. Additionally, “Arabic culture” is a broad term, which contains many subcultures that differ to some extent from each other due to geographical, demographical, political and social factors. For example, the Saudi and Yemeni cultures are quite different from Egyptian or Lebanese cultures in those terms. Furthermore, the study does not cover subtitling swearing in fansubbing, nor the strategies employed for that purpose.

2.10 Subtitling strategies

In the field of translation studies, various definitions of “translation strategy” are found. According to Lörscher (1991, p.76), translation strategy is “a potentially conscious procedure for the solution of a problem with which an individual is faced when translating a text segment from one language into another.” This definition is close to that of Chesterman (1997, p.89) who defines translation studies as “goal-oriented and problem-centred procedures based on the choices the translator has made from among several alternatives “. Thus, it can be inferred that some translation strategies might be used unconsciously during translation. However, whether those strategies are used consciously or unconsciously, the perception of the translated text will be affected heavily as a result of the strategies used.

Many scholars in the field of translation studies, such as Darbelnet (1995), Newmark, (1988b), Levy (2000), and Venuti (1995/2008) have proposed various classifications of translation strategies. Also, some previous studies of subtitling (e.g. Gottlieb, 1994; Ivarsson and Carroll, 1998; Aixelá, 1996; Diaz Cintas and Remael, 2007; and Tomasziewicz, 1993 have discussed various strategies which can be used for dealing with different issues in subtitling, mainly subtitling of cultural references. In this study, the taxonomy proposed by Tomasziewicz (1993)³ will be adopted. Discussing the taxonomies mentioned above would exceed the scope of this study.

³ This source is written in French language which I do not have access to, so I referred to the some authentic studies such as Díaz Cintas (2009) and Nguyen (2015).

2.11 Tomaszekiewicz's Strategies

Tomaszekiewicz (1993) cited in Díaz Cintas (2009) proposes that there are eight strategies used in film subtitling. These strategies are suggested to deal particularly with cultural references in subtitling; however, they can also be used for subtitling of swear words in films. The strategies proposed are as follows:

1. Omission, whereby the cultural reference is omitted altogether.
 2. Literal translation, where the solution in the target text matches the original as closely as possible
 3. Borrowing, where original terms from the source text are used in the target text.
 4. Equivalence, where translation has a similar meaning and function in the target culture.
 5. Adaptation, where the translation is adjusted to the target language and culture in an attempt to evoke similar connotations to the original. Strictly speaking, this can be considered a form of equivalence.
 6. Replacement of the cultural term with deictics, particularly when supported by an on-screen gesture or a visual clue.
 7. Generalization, which might also be referred to as neutralization of the original.
 8. Explication, which usually involves a paraphrase to explain the cultural term.
- (Díaz Cintas, 2009, p.45)

This study will adopt a modified version of Tomaszekiewicz's classification. The definition of Equivalence is a notoriously problematic concept in Translation Studies. It is beyond the scope of this study to engage with the intricacies of the concept, and in the interest of clarity, it will be combined with the category of literal translation here

and the latter term will be used in this thesis to refer to both equivalence and literal translation strategies.

2.12 Foreignisation vs. domestication

Venuti (1995) introduced two concepts to deal with the orientation of the translation either towards the source language or the target language, namely domestication and foreignization. Within these two concepts, different strategies are employed. Munday defines domestication as “translating in a transparent, fluent, invisible style to minimise the foreignness of the target text” (2012, p. 218). This means that the translated text would be easily readable, and the norms of the target language and culture would not be violated. On the other hand, foreignisation is an approach in which the translated text retains elements of the source language and the foreignising elements in the target language and culture.

Venuti notes that both domestication and foreignisation can be applied at two levels: the micro level and the macro level. The latter refers to the process of selection of the text to be translated, while the former refers to the actual methods employed for translating the texts (1998, p. 240). Venuti (1998) elaborates by stating that by applying the domesticating approach, translated works tend to be read in a fluent, transparent manner in which the foreignness of the texts are modified or eliminated, to comply with the norms and values of the target culture.

On the one hand, the foreignising approach has some merits. It is a key factor in introducing the foreignising elements to the target language in the translation. Venuti states that the foreignising approach establishes a connection between the source and target cultures, in which the foreign elements are different from the prevailing values

and norms (1995). Venuti favours foreignisation as it “is highly desirable [as a way] to restrain the ethnocentric violence of translation” (1995, p.20). Venuti advocates foreignisation, as “a translated text should be the site where a different culture emerges, where a reader gets a glimpse of a culture other” (1995, p. 306).

On the other hand, domestication is effective and useful in some cases, as it helps the translated work to be read fluently and thus gain commercial success in the target market. Domesticated texts are also likely to pass the restricted censorship in some countries, such as Arabic countries, where censorship is one of the key areas where translation is carefully inspected before a green light is granted to release the work. Another factor which might affect the translator’s decision to opt for domestication strategies is that some aspects and expressions might be very normal in the English culture, but very offensive to the Arabic culture; thus, translators need to comply with the norms of the target language and culture to avoid such violations.

In this study, the concepts of domestication and foreignisation will be used to give an overview of the extent to which the prosubber and fansubber are faithful to the source text. In other words, this concept will deal with swearing in a general sense, while Tomasziewicz’s strategies will be used to give a more detailed description of the strategies used for each swear word.

2.13 Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS)

Descriptive translation studies (DTS) was first introduced by Holmes (1972/2000). He indicates that research in DTS can be classified into three major types: product-oriented DTS, function-oriented DTS, and process-oriented DTS. The first type refers to studying an existing translation or an analysis of various comparative translations of

the same text. The second type has to do with the function of translation in the target social-cultural context, while process-oriented DTS refers to activities that have taken place, not in the text, but in translators' minds when translating texts.

Toury (1995) developed DTS further. He indicated that the translation strategies applied by translators are influenced heavily by the position of translated works in the target context. For a systematic target-oriented methodology, Munday summarises the three phases of Toury's methodology as follows:

Situate the text within the target culture system, looking at its significance or acceptability. Compare the ST and the TT for shifts, identifying relationships between 'coupled pairs' of ST and TT segments, and attempting generalizations about the underlying concept of translation. Draw implications for decision-making in future translating. (Munday 2001:112).

2.14 Translation Norms

Toury introduces the concept of norms as a methodological approach for describing the rules that determine the translational behaviours in a given target context.

According to Toury (1995), norms can be defined as:

the translation of general values or ideas shared by a community – as to what is right and wrong, adequate and inadequate – into performance instructions appropriate for and applicable to particular situations, specifying what is prescribed and forbidden as well as what is tolerated and permitted in a certain behavioural dimension (Toury, 1995, p. 55).

According to Toury, norms “determine the (type and extent of) equivalence manifested by actual Translations” (1995, p. 61). In other words, norms are social and cultural

constraints that represent a certain community in a given time. Such norms tend to be inherited and acquired through antecedent generations and through educational and social systems. However, these norms are not at the same level of powerfulness and effectiveness in ruling translation activities. Toury indicates that there are two major sources that researchers can use to reconstruct the translational norms: textual and extratextual. The first one revolves around the translated text, which in turn gives an indication of the pattern of relationship between the source and target text. Thus, conclusions can be drawn about “norm-governed instances of behaviour”. The second source is extratextual and might include statements made by translators, reviewers, editors or any other external agents involved in translation (1995, p. 65). However, Toury notes that extratextual might be subject to bias and impartiality as such statements are made by “interested parties”. They might be expected to be partial and subjective (1995, p. 65). Toury (1995, p.66) adds that there might be situations where these parties deliberately deceive as “intentions do not necessarily concur with any declaration of intent”.

Toury (1995) classified norms into three different taxonomies namely, initial norms, preliminary norms, and operational norms. These norms act at different phases of translation. The first type refers to whether the translator is adhering to the norms of the source text or the norms of the target text and the target culture. If the translation inclines to the norms of the source text, then it can be claimed the translation is adequate. On the other hand, if the translation is target-text oriented, this means the translation is acceptable (Toury, 1995, p. 56-57).

In this study, the translation strategies used in both Arabic subtitles will show whether the subtitlers have abided by the social, religious and political norms of the target

culture or not. According to Toury, the translation cannot be fully source-oriented (adequate) or target-oriented (acceptable), as there will be a shift from source-text oriented to target-text oriented and vice versa. In his opinion “the occurrence of shifts has long been acknowledged as a true universal of translation” (1995, p. 57). However, the frequency of translation strategies employed in the prosubs and the fansubs will determine to what extent both subtitles are source or target-oriented.

While preliminary norms can be classified into translation policy and directness of the translation Toury (1995, p. 58) the former is related to regulations regarding the selection of a work to be translated into a target language at a given time. On the other hand, directness of translation refers to the idea of whether a work has been translated through intermediate language or directly, without involving an intermediate language. In case of subtitling *Pulp Fiction*, the translation is directly from English into Arabic and there is no intermediate language.

The third taxonomy of norms comprises operational norms, which take place during the process of translation. This type encompasses matricial norms and textual-linguistic norms. Matricial norms relate to the completeness of the target text. These norms may involve the addition of a footnote or the relocation or omission of text, while textual-linguistic norms deal with the stylistic features of the target text (Toury, 1995, p. 58-59). This type of norms is not applicable to the corpus of this study as there was no footnote or relocation of the source text and the dialogue of the film was subtitled fully and there is not missing excerpts when compared to the Arabic subtitled versions. In some forms of fansubbing, particularly in the case of Japanese anime, subtitlers do make use of pop-up glosses, which would be relevant to this norm, but this is not the case in the current case study.

In conclusion, it can be noticed from the previous literature that there is a lack of studies which deal with offensive language and how such language is subtitled into other languages, notably Arabic. Taboo language deserves as much attention as any other linguistic phenomenon. Additionally, the subtitling of swear words by fansubbers has been neglected largely in the Arabic context. For these reasons, it is hoped that this study will bridge the gap in the literature, which has not yet been covered with a comparison between the prosubs and fansubs subtitling of swear words into Arabic.

Furthermore, to find out how swearing is subtitled from English into Arabic both in prosubs and fansubs, the use of different translation strategies to render swear words into Arabic will be investigated. According to the strategies used, it can be determined whether the subtitlers have adopted a source-oriented (foreignization) or a target-oriented approach (domestication) and to what extent the two Arabic versions, namely prosubs and fansubs are similar. This analysis will reveal how the two translators have dealt with swearing instances and what strategies they used for that purpose. Therefore, subtitling strategies proposed by Tomaszekiewicz (see section 2.11) will be adopted in this study to identify the strategies used by the two subtitlers.

Due to the characteristics of internet fansubs, this study will test the hypothesis that the anonymity of the fansubbers and the lack of official restrictions may motivate the fansubbers to adopt a source-oriented approach and thus not to conform to the norms and conventions of the target culture. Therefore, through identification of the translation strategies, it can be determined whether there is a significant difference between the prosubs and the fansubs. It is hoped that this study might serve as a basis for further research on the subtitling of swear words in general, and for a further exploration of the phenomenon of fansubbing.

The next chapter will be dedicated to how the research questions of this study will be answered, what the sources are from which the data of this study will be taken and how the data will be categorized and analyzed.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Selection of material

In order to address the research questions, this study will employ a case study of one film. The film that was selected for the study is Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994). Since the study is interested in the translation of swear words, a text had to be selected that has a high concentration of swear words. *Pulp Fiction* was rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) for "strong graphic violence and drug use, pervasive strong language and some sexuality". The film was categorised among the films in which the F-word is used most. Soler Pardo (2011) indicates that the number of taboo expressions in *Pulp Fiction* was unprecedented in the history of cinema. Soler Pardo (2011) adds that an enormous amount of obscene language was a key factor in the unexpected success of the film. Therefore, *Pulp Fiction* was a phenomenon because films containing a high volume of swear words are often subject to partial or complete censorship or the film may be released quietly and thus don't achieve the desired success. *Pulp Fiction* is unique in that the film uses taboo expressions from the opening to the final scene and surprisingly achieved huge success.

Besides winning The Oscar for Best Screenplay, *Pulp Fiction* represents a revolution in the history of Hollywood. The unique structure of the film and the brilliant dialogue as well as the excessive use of foul language have inspired later movies and TV programs to adopt and imitate different elements of *Pulp Fiction*'s style. In addition, many critics consider *Pulp Fiction* as the greatest work Tarantino has ever made. In 2008, the magazine *Entertainment Weekly* named *Pulp Fiction* the best film since 1983. Moreover, the Library of Congress selected *Pulp Fiction* to be preserved in the U.S.

National Film Registry as the film is significant culturally, historically and aesthetically. On most Arabic websites, the film is still downloaded frequently, with many recent reviews and comments. This gives an indication that the film is still relevant today, 23 years after its release.

3.2 Data collection

The data collection for this study consisted of three stages. First, it was necessary to obtain the dialogue script of the film, which was downloaded from <http://www.opensubtitles.org>. The film was watched repeatedly with its dialogue script (in written form) to ensure the accuracy of the film and its script. In the second stage, to obtain the prosubs, the film *Pulp Fiction*, which includes the video, audio, and official subtitles, was purchased and the subtitles extracted using SmartRipper. To obtain the Arabic subtitles with timings, another program called SubRip was used. This program allows the Arabic subtitles to be converted to textual form. In the third stage, the internet fansubs were taken from <http://www.subscenes.com>. Regarding the identity of the creators of the Arabic subtitles, the prosubs were conducted by an unidentified prosubber, and the internet fansubs were done by a fansubber who goes by the name of Shaker Hamdy.

The internet fansubs created by Shaker Hamdy were selected because of its wide popularity, as it is available in most of the Arabic websites such as Fushaar, Dardarkom, Sugarxworld and Anakbnet, from which English films with Arabic subtitles can be downloaded. It is also the most downloaded fansubs on these websites as well as on subscenes.com. Although there were some anonymous internet fansubs for *Pulp Fiction*, the fansubs were identical to Shaker's fansub, indicating that they were the same fansubs. There are fansubs created in the Egyptian dialect, but they were

excluded from this study as the focus in this study is on Modern Standard Arabic as used in both the prosubs and the fansubs. All these reasons contributed significantly to the selection of Shaker's translation to be the primary source of data for the fansubs for the present study.

3.3 Method

First, each use of a swear word was identified in the original script and then classified according to Andersson and Trudgill's typology, in which they categorize swearing as having one of four purposes: expletive swearing, abusive swearing, humorous swearing and auxiliary swearing (1990). Then each swear word in the original script was compared with its corresponding "equivalent" in the prosubs and the fansubs. This comparison shows the distribution and frequency of each instance of a swear word in the original version and the subtitled versions. Then the strategies employed in rendering swearing were identified and categorized based on a modified version of Tomaszekiewicz's classification, in which he proposes eight strategies in subtitling, namely, omission, literal translation, borrowing, equivalence, adaptation, replacement, generalization, and explication. As discussed in the previous chapter, since the definition of equivalence is problematic, that strategy was combined with the category of literal translation. Subsequently, a quantitative investigation was conducted to examine the distribution, frequency percentage and the sum of each strategy in the Arabic subtitled versions, i.e., prosubs and fansubs. This investigation includes a quantitative comparison of the swear words in the English version and the two subtitled versions, which helps to determine whether there are significant differences between the subtitled versions or not. Based on the quantitative results, a qualitative discussion is provided.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter consists of two main sections. The first section contains the quantitative analysis of the data obtained. Here, a quantitative overview of swear words in the English dialogue and two subtitled versions is presented, including the frequency and distribution of swear words in the source text and the two target texts. The qualitative analysis is presented in the second section, the main aim with this is to investigate the manner in which swear words have been dealt with in the prosubs and fansubs. This section is divided into four subsections according to the swearing classification proposed by Andersson and Trudgill (1990) namely, expletive swearing, abusive swearing, humorous swearing and auxiliary swearing.

4.1 Quantitative analysis

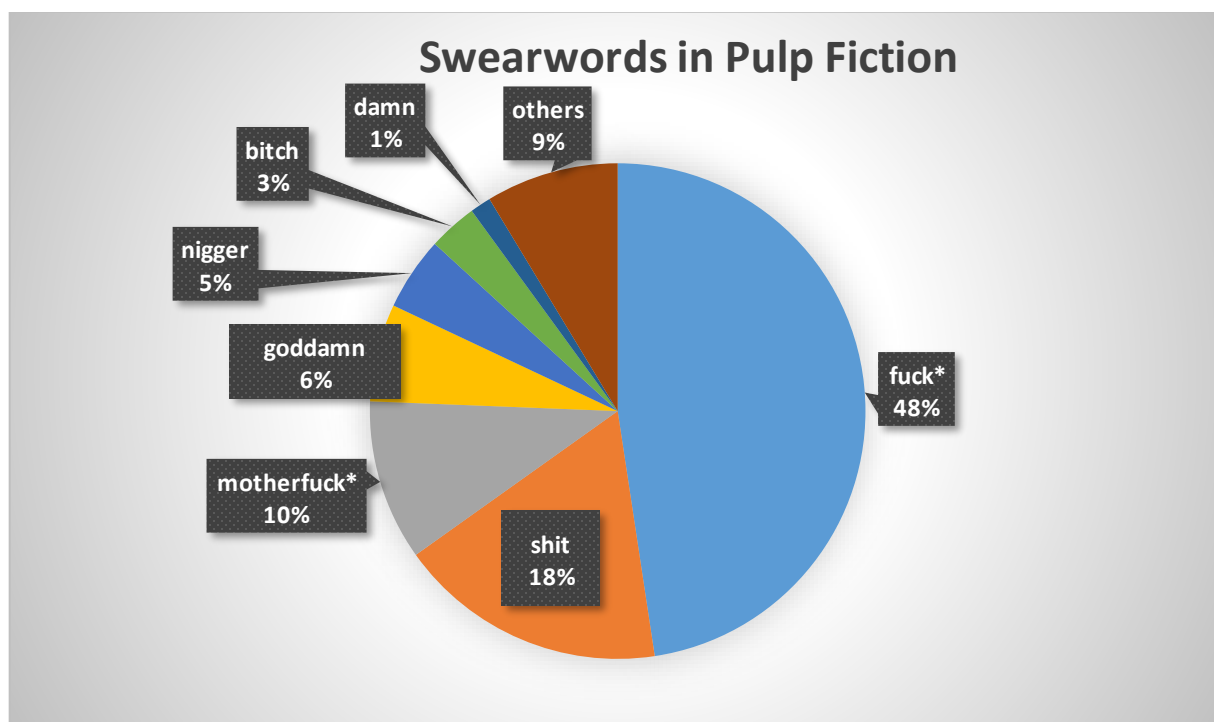


Figure 2: Distribution of swear words in Pulp Fiction

The original dialogue of the film *Pulp Fiction* contains about 476 utterances which are considered to be swear words. The most frequent swear words of these are *fuck* (and its variants), *shit*, *motherfucker*, *goddamn*, *nigger*, *bitch* and *damn*. Several expletives have been used less than five times in the film and these are categorized as *others* in Figure 2. The focus of the analysis will be on the lemma of each swear word as some swear words can occur in several grammatical forms. For instance, the word *fuck* can appear as *fucking*, *fucked* or *fucker*. In this case, the lemma of the above-mentioned swear words is the word *fuck*.

After analysing the swear words in the prosub and the fansub versions, and based on the lemma of each word, the main offensive words occurring in the prosubs are تبا [may evil befall] سافل [mean] أو لعين [damn & damned] زنجي [nigger], while in the fansub version, the swear words used most frequently are تبا [may evil befall], لعنه أو لعين [damn & damned], عاهرة [prostitute], أخرس [shut up], زنجي [nigger]. It is clearly observable that both subtitles have greatly reduced the number of swear words overall (Those swear words that occurred fewer than five times in both subtitles have not been included in the quantitative analysis). The reason for this is that most of these words are no longer seen as offensive as they have been toned down and euphemised to the extent that they have become a part of natural, everyday language. Examples of this are the words شرير [evil], ترهات [trivia] and سأقضي الحاجة [I will do the thing to refer to going to the toilet]. Some of these words will be presented and discussed in detail in the qualitative section of this paper as they may indicate whether there is any significant difference between the prosub and the fansub versions. The following figure shows the Arabic words used frequently in both subtitled versions.

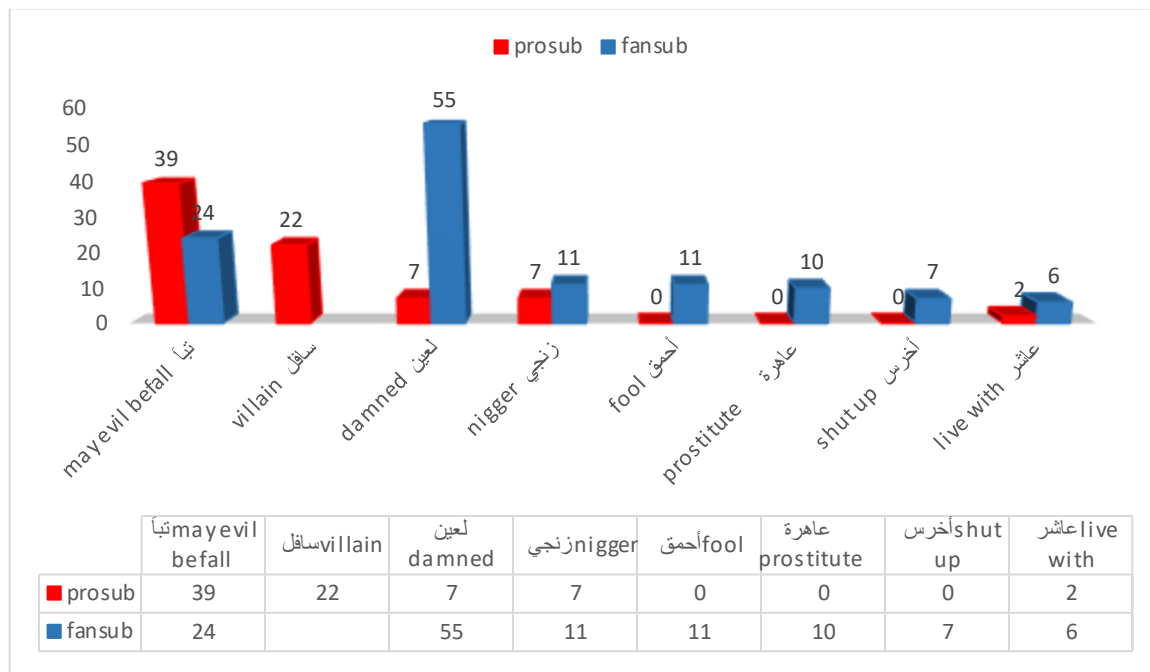


Figure 3: The most frequent swear words in prosubs and fansubs

Figure 3 shows that the word “تبا” [may evil befall] is used 39 times in the prosub version, while the fansub version uses the same word 24 times. Cumulatively, this word is the most prevalent Arabic swear word used in both subtitles, appearing 63 times in total. The word “لعين” [damned] with its variants is the second most common word occurring in both subtitles, appearing 62 times. The fansubs used this word 55 times; the prosubs used this word only 7 times. This indicates that each subtitler has his/her own preference for certain words, as the prosubber of the official prosubs favours the word “تبا” [may evil befall]. On the other hand, the fansubber prefers the word اللعين [damned] for most of the English swear words found in the film.

The fansubs included a greater number of swear words and these tended to be more offensive than their counterparts in the prosub version. Furthermore, all the Arabic swear words have been used more frequently in the fansubs, the only exception being the word “تبا” [may evil befall] which was used more frequently in the prosubs. The

total instances of swearing in the fansubs outnumber that in the official version, with 77 uses of swear words in the prosubs, compared to 124 uses in the fansubs, a significant increase of 61%.

Furthermore, it is apparent from the above chart that very few Arabic swear words have been used in the prosubs compared to the fansubs. For instance, the prosubber restricted him/herself to only five swear words and uses them repeatedly. This indicates that the prosubber is more consistent in choosing swear words than the fansubber. On the other hand, it could be said the fansubber is more creative in coming up with, and using a variety of swear words. The results, as shown in Figure 3, indicate that both the prosubber and the fansubber used four of the same swear words, namely *تبا* [may evil befall], *لعين* [damned], *زنجي* [nigger] and *عاشر* [lived with].

Regarding the severity of the words used, those utilised in the fansubs are more obscene and vulgar than those adopted by the prosubber. For instance, the word *عاهرة* [prostitute] is more offensive than any of the other words on the list. This word is used 10 times in the fansubs, but not at all in the prosubs. In addition, the words *أحمق* [fool] and *أخرس* [shut up] were used in the fansubs only. On the other hand, the word *سافل* [mean] emerged in the prosubs only.

With respect to translation strategies used in the prosubs, Figure 4 below presents an overview of the types and frequency of translation strategies used for rendering swear words from English into Arabic in the official prosubs of *Pulp Fiction*. The significantly dominant strategy of omission accounts for 68% of the total number of translation strategies used in these subtitles. This means that just over two-thirds of the swearing expressions in the film have been omitted altogether. The second most common strategy employed is adaptation, which has been used 83 times throughout the

official subtitle, accounting for 18% of the translation strategies utilized. Generalization, as the third most common strategy, was used 54 times, while the literal translation strategy was used only 16 times. Other strategies such as replacement, borrowing and explication were not used for the two Arabic subtitles.

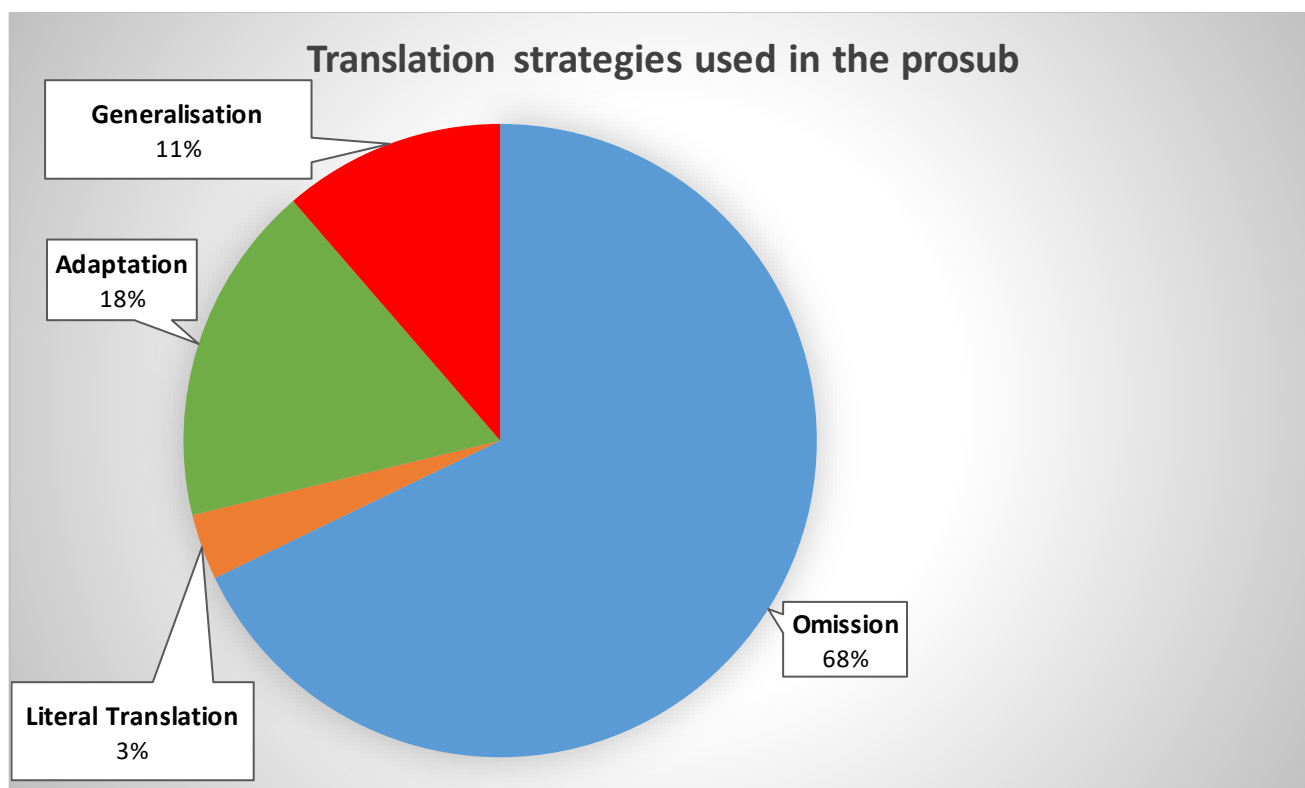


Figure 4: Translation strategies used in the prosub

On the other hand, the strategies adopted in the fansubs do not differ significantly as far as the omission strategy is concerned. The following figure (5) illustrates the proportion of translation strategies employed in the fansub version. Similar to the prosubs, omission is the most prevalent strategy used in the fansubs to deal with English swear words. Of the 476 instances of swearing found in the original English version, 296 have been omitted in the Arabic fansub version. This number represents 62% of the total number of strategies used in the subtitles. The second major strategy

is adaptation, which has been used in the fansubs 86 times. The least frequently used strategy in the fansubs is generalization, which accounts for 7% of the strategies used.

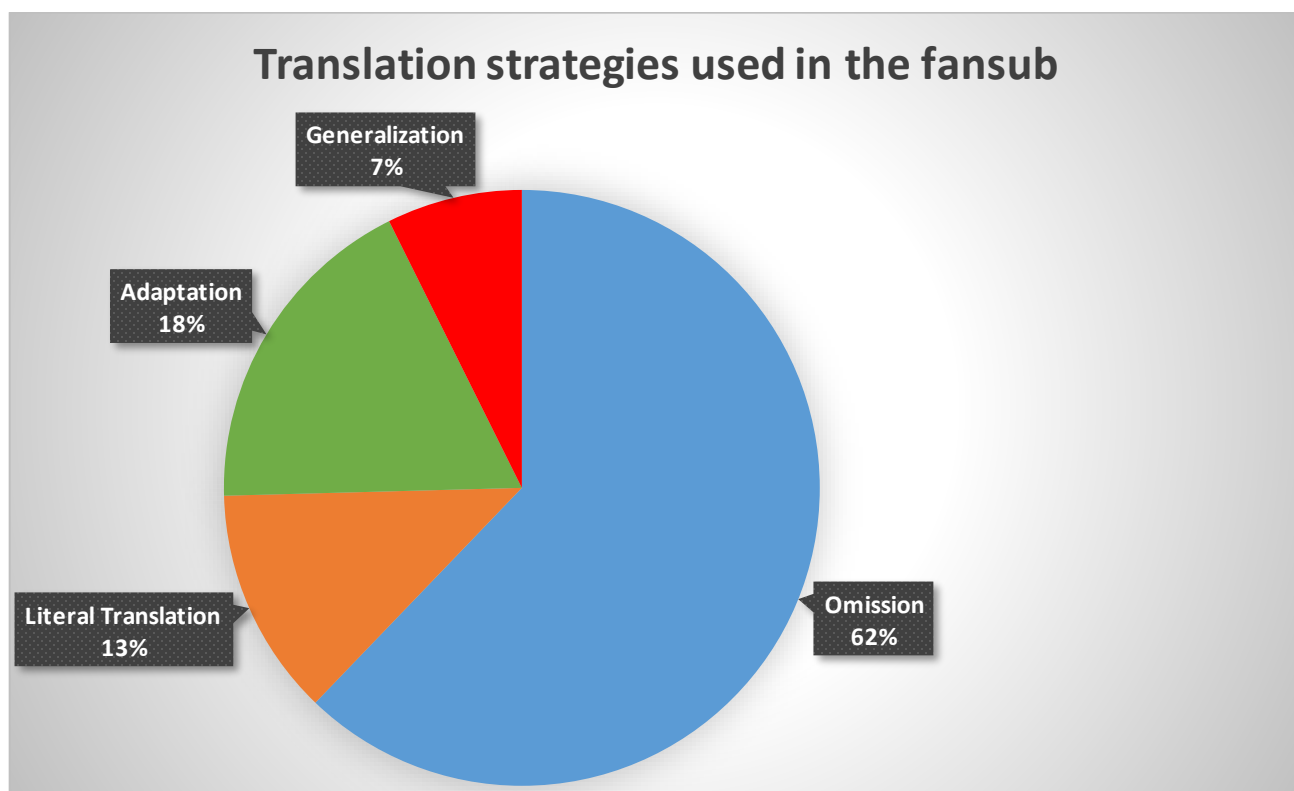


Figure 5: Translation strategies used in the fansub

Clearly, omission and adaptation are the most common translation strategies used in both the prosub and fansub versions. It is also notable that literal translation occurred more frequently (59 times) in the fansubs than in the prosubs (16 times). Furthermore, neither the fansub nor the official prosub version used replacement, borrowing or explication.

In conclusion, the most obvious finding to emerge from the quantitative analysis is that a great number of swear words have been omitted by the prosubber and the fansubber. Such a considerable reduction of swearing in the two Arabic subtitled versions compared to the original English dialogue may be linked to the norms of

Arabic culture, which tends to be more conservative and less prone to swearing than American culture. This finding broadly supports the work of other studies such as Karjalainen (2002), and Ghassempur (2009) which investigated the translation of offensive language. In both studies, two translations of the same source text were compared. It was found that most of the English swear words had been omitted when translated into Swedish and German respectively. Given that both the Swedish and German cultures have more in common with American culture than does the Arabic culture, such omissions in the two Arabic subtitled versions might not be surprising or unexpected.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of the type of swearing on the translation strategy used in both subtitled versions. It was found that the category of swearing had a significant effect on the translation strategy, $F(1, 15) = 92.92$, $p < 0.001$. In other words, the type of swearing, namely, expletive, abusive, humorous, or auxiliary, heavily affects the translation strategies adopted. This can be clearly seen from abusive swearing, in which the omission strategy is used more commonly than in any other type of swearing. However, there was no statistically significant difference between the prosubs and the fansubs in terms of the effect of swearing types and the strategies used. In terms of research question 2, it can therefore be stated that there was no significant difference between the two forms of subtitling in terms of the translation strategies used. Nevertheless, the qualitative analysis will be useful to uncover, in more detail, each category of swearing in the prosub and fansub versions, and how they are subtitled into Arabic.

4.2 Qualitative analysis

4.2.1 Expletive swearing

According to Andersson and Trudgill (1990), expletive swearing is used as a means of expressing negative feelings such as anger, pain, frustration and so forth. This type of swearing is not directed at any particular person as the speaker may be alone when s/he is swearing. Such swearing has a syntactic function, without any semantic value. Figure 6 below presents an overview of the strategies used for this type of swearing.

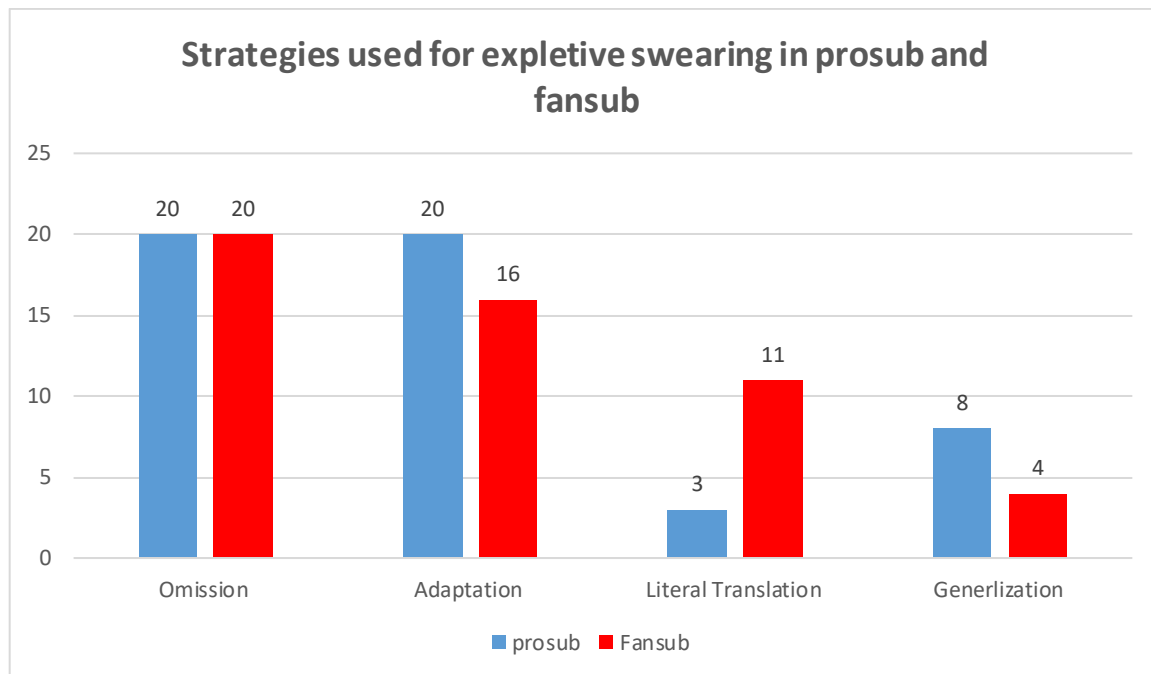


Figure 6: Strategies used for expletive swearing in prosubs and fansubs

From the graph above, we can see that omission is the predominant strategy having been used 20 times in both Arabic subtitled versions. There are 51 instances of expletive swearing in the film and, if both subtitles opt for the omission strategy, this means that 40% of expletive swearing has been eliminated from the Arabic versions. Similar to the omission strategy, the adaptation strategy has been used 20 times in the

prosub version, and 16 times in the fansub version. What stands out in this graph is that the literal translation strategy was used more often (11 times) in the fansubs than in the prosubs (3 times). This suggests that the prosubber is more inclined to domesticate the source text. This is confirmed by the strategy of generalization, which was applied to the prosub version twice more than the fansub version.

In regards to expletive swearing, the most commonly used word in the film (19 times) is *fuck* and its various forms. This is followed by the word *Goddamn* (13 times) and *shit* (6 times). The word *fuck*, when used for expletive swearing, presented a major challenge for subtitlers of both versions, as they could not choose the literal translation strategy for all 19 instances of the word *fuck*. Other English expletive swearing instances have been toned down and adapted by using adaptation and generalization strategies to lessen the severity of swear word.

In 40% of expletive swearing cases, the omission strategy was employed for both subtitled versions. Hence, there are many instances where feelings of anger and frustration are not reflected accurately in either of the Arabic subtitle versions. Thus, there is a discrepancy between the words presented on the screen and the action that viewers are actually seeing. Examples 1 and 2 below illustrate a situation where the speaker is shouting and swearing, while the translations in both subtitles are devoid of emotion and do not accurately reflect the situation and the character's feelings. Although there are acoustic and visual channels enabling viewers to determine the characters' emotions, the text appearing on the screen should faithfully convey the intended meaning of the scene and the dialogue, and in fact contradict the meaning. Adapting other translation strategies and toning down the expletives might be an appropriate solution as the intended feeling can be conveyed while simultaneously

toning down the offensive element of the source text, thereby conforming to the norms of the target culture.

Example1:

What the fuck's going on out here?

Prosub: ماذا يجري هنا؟

[What is going on here?]

Fansub: ما الذي يحدث بالخارج؟

[What is happening outside?]

Example 2:

What the hell was that?

Prosub: ما كان ذلك؟

[What was that?]

Fansub: ما هذا؟

[What is that?]

On the other hand, literal translations have been used more frequently in the fansub version than in the prosub version. However, in the fansubs, the strategy was not employed consistently even for the same English swear word. The examples below illustrate the inconsistent application of translation strategies.

Example 3:

The goddamn phone's ringing!

Prosub: (لانس), الهاتف سمعته يرن -

[I heard the phone ringing]

Fansub: (لانس) الهاتف اللعين يرن

[The damned phone is ringing]

Example 4:

It's 1:30 in the goddamn morning.

Prosub: إنها الواحدة والنصف صباحاً

[It is one-thirty in the morning]

Fansub: إنها الواحدة ونصف صباحاً

[It is one-thirty in the morning]

Clearly, the literal translation was used in the fansub and resulted in “the damned phone is ringing”. Here, the fansubber chose this strategy in order to maintain the swear word and its function as a signifier and a tool for expressing negative emotions. In addition, as many Arabs use such expressions, the translation is not offensive or shocking. However, the prosubber has omitted the swear word and the translated sentence is devoid of any expression of anger, thereby not accurately reflecting the character’s emotion.

However, in Example 4, the same word with the same function has been treated differently in the fansub. In Examples 3 and 4, the prosubber was more conservative

and more consistent in omitting the word *goddamn*. There might be several possible reasons for the fansubber to omit the word *goddamn* in this example. One might be that cursing or abusing time is not as common as in the English language, and a literal translation will not produce an idiomatic expression. Moreover, according to Islamic beliefs, it is not permitted to curse time, which could be another reason for omitting the swear word in both Arabic versions. According to the Prophet Mohammed, God said: "The son of Adam hurts Me by abusing Time, for I am Time; in My Hands are all things and I cause the revolution of night and day". This implies that religious ideology may be behind the decision to omit this term in both the prosub and the fansub version.

Furthermore, profanities are used in the film for expletive swearing. This presents a substantial challenge for translators as English and Arabic cultures swear in different ways, particularly when it comes to using blasphemous expressions. The following examples illustrate this point clearly:

Example 5:

Oh, Jesus fucking Christ

Prosub: يا إلهي!

[Oh my God]

Fansub : يا إلهي :

[Oh my God]

Example 6:

Jesus Christ. Goddamn it.

Prosub: يا إلهي!

[Oh my God]

Fansub: يا إلهي!

[Oh my God]

Evidently, profane expressions are subject to censorship either by subtitlers or by editors and producers at a later stage. Such expressions would be culturally and religiously unacceptable if the phrases were translated literally. Therefore, both subtitles in the two examples and other similar examples in the film as well, have identical translations in this case. The words *Jesus Christ* have been substituted with the words “oh my God” as the concept of God is seen differently by Christian and Islamic cultures. Another reason could be the manner in which Arabic and English cultures blaspheme and use offensive language. For example, in the Arabic culture in general, if people want to express their anger or frustration, they do not use blasphemous words, nor will they invoke a dead or righteous person or even a prophet, at least publicly. This avoidance of profane and blasphemous expressions stems from Islamic teachings which consider lack of respect and any type of insulting religious expressions as extremely offensive, often punishable by law in several Arabic and Islamic countries. Khuddro (2000) indicates that taboo expressions are normally omitted in Arabic subtitles, as Arabic recipients do not tolerate sexual and religious references. However, some blasphemous expressions might be uttered by Arabs, although this is a rare occurrence and is usually in colloquial Arabic, not Modern Standard Arabic which is used on television and in subtitles. Also, because written

language tends to be harsher than spoken language, subtitlers find it difficult to use some offensive words that will appear on the screen.

Another issue as shown in Example 5, is that the word *fucking* is used as an intensifier and emphasiser before the word *Christ*. The use of such words in reference to a prophet would be extremely insulting and offensive to Arabic viewers. In Islamic and Arabic cultures, the prophet Jesus is like Mohammed, Moses, Noah, Abraham and other prophets whom people should greatly respect and venerate. Blaspheming in public might be tolerated or even accepted in secular societies such as that in America, but this is not the case in Arabic culture. Therefore, it is to be expected that the prosubber and the fansubber will omit the swear word *fucking* and replace the words *Jesus Christ* with the word *God* in order to comply with the cultural and religious norms of the target culture.

In expletive swearing as well as other types of swearing, both subtitle versions contained words that belong to the religious domain in order to avoid the offensiveness of the swear words in the original dialogue. For expletive swearing, the words *fuck* and *shit* have been used extensively in the film, but in the subtitled versions, the translations do not have sexual or scatological connotations; nor do they match the intended level of obscenity. On the contrary, the words were toned down and both subtitlers used words with religious connotations. The words *shit* and *fuck* when used for expletive swearing have been rendered in several cases into “تبا” [may evil befall] in the prosubs, while the same words have been translated into “اللعة” [damn] in the fansubs. The two Arabic words used in the two subtitled versions represent a high proportion of the words used in place of the English swear words in the film. As mentioned earlier, the word “لعنة” [damn] was used 55 times, mostly in the fansubs; the word “تبا” [may evil

befall] occurred 39 times in the prosubs and 24 times in the fansubs. Both words belong to very ancient religious literature and Arabs nowadays no longer use them when swearing as they swear using colloquial Arabic not the Modern Standard Arabic that is used in film subtitles.

Apart from the cultural and ideological factors affecting the way that subtitlers deal with swear words, another reason for resorting to archaic words could be that Modern Standard Arabic has to be used for subtitling films and it is considered as high register and formal language, while swearing tends to be in dialectic and informal speech. This leaves no option for subtitlers but to find corresponding words within this register. Apart from that, there are several obscene colloquial Arabic words which can be considered as an equivalent for certain English swear words but using Modern Standard Arabic as the language for subtitling makes this problematic, and other media impose many linguistic constraints on subtitlers. Gamal (2012) points out that only Modern Standard Arabic is acceptable in translation in general, and other Arabic dialects are neither preferred nor appreciated. This is even more the case for the subtitling of films. However, there are some exceptions for dubbed series where other dialects, mainly Egyptian, are used.

Another issue relates to the shift from spoken to written form. Subtitlers find it a challenge to deal with swear words which are uttered verbally and in an informal style in the source language, and translate them to formal written language. Moreover, words are harsher and more offensive when expressed in writing rather than verbally. Our results are supported by those of Greenall (2008) when he compared the original text with the subtitles and translation into Norwegian of the film *Commitments* (Doyle, 1987). Greenall found that the original work tended to contain more swear words than

did the subtitled version. Consequently, the huge reduction of the number of swear words in the two Arabic subtitled versions is not surprising.

The following section presents the translation strategies employed to render abusive swearing into Arabic. This is followed by a discussion of several examples showing how each subtitled version has dealt with English swear words.

4.2.2 Abusive swearing

In this section, a brief overview is given of the strategies used in both subtitled versions, namely the prosubs and fansubs. This section begins by considering the most common swear words used in the film for abusive swearing in addition to the most frequently used offensive words in both subtitled versions. This is followed by a discussion of how the main swear words are rendered into Arabic, and the possible explanations for the choices made by the subtitlers of the prosub and fansub versions.

Andersson and Trudgill (1990, 61) define abusive swearing as swearing that is “directed towards others; derogatory; includes name-calling and different types of curses”. This type of swearing is different from other swearing in the sense that it requires an addressee. It is meant to hurt and insult and is delivered aggressively. In the following paragraphs, the frequency and percentage of translation strategies used for abusive swearing will be discussed.

Comparing the two subtitles, it can be seen from the figure below that omission is the most widely used translation strategy, with 160 instances of omission in the prosubs and 141 in the fansubs. This means that approximately 68% of English swearing expressions have been omitted completely in the prosub version, with a slightly lower percentage in the fansub version of approximately 60%. This is followed by the

adaptation strategy, which is the second most common strategy for both subtitled versions. It was used more frequently in the fansubs (54 times) than in the prosubs (43 times). Conversely, the generalization strategy was used more often in the prosub version (26 times) compared to the fansub version (15 times). What stands out in this chart is the usage of literal translation in the fansubs occurring 25 times compared to only 6 times in the prosubs. This may indicate that the fansubber tends to translate some abusive terms more freely and literally than does the prosubber. Below, we examine how certain examples of abusive swearing have been rendered into Arabic, enabling us to ascertain whether or not there is a significant difference between the two subtitled versions.

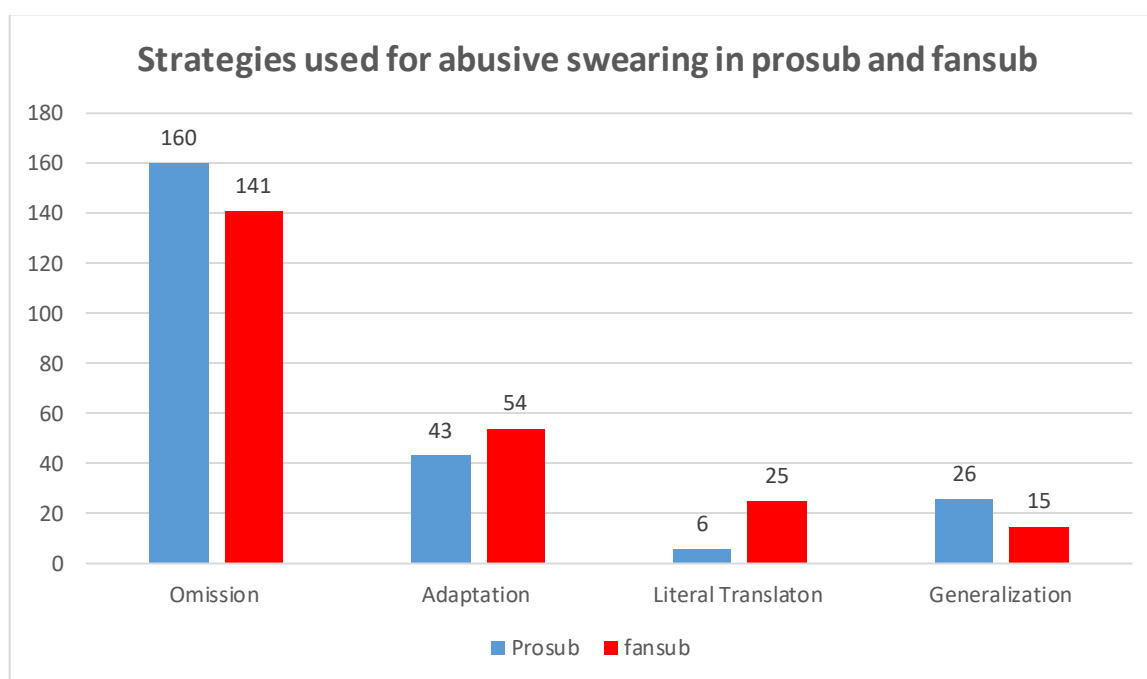


Figure 7: Strategies used for abusive swearing in prosubs and fansubs

Before considering individual cases, it is essential to have an overall overview of the types of swear words used in the English dialogue and in the Arabic versions. In *Pulp Fiction*, 236 instances of abusive swearing were found. The main swear words

used for this type of swearing are *fuck* and its various forms (occurring 114 times), *motherfucker* (35 times), *ass* (19 times) *nigger* and *bitch* (15 times) and *shit* (11 times). In Arabic, the main words used for English abusive swear words are لعين (damned), سافل (villain), تنبا (may evil befall), زنجي (nigger), and عاهرة (prostitute). The frequency of these words is based on the lemma of each word.

As mentioned earlier, not only is the word *fuck* the most prevalent word in the English script - it is also the most challenging word for translators particularly when they abandon the omission strategy. Due to the inherent nature of this word and the significant linguistic and cultural differences between English and Arabic, many instances of the word *fuck* have to be toned down and euphemised in Arabic versions. Consider the following example.

Example 7:

So what he'd do? Fuck her?

Prosub: إذاً، ماذا فعل؟ هل عاشرها؟

[So, what did he do? Lived with her?]

Fansub: إذاً، ماذا حدث؟ هل عاشرها؟

[So, what happened? lived with her?]

In this example, the offensive word *fuck* has been euphemised to mitigate the vulgar tone of the word. Both subtitles have opted for the adaptation strategy and translated the word as يعيش [live with]. This word literally means living with someone but it can also be used metaphorically to refer to sexual intercourse, particularly where the

context involves a husband and wife or a man and woman. This word is a broad and euphemized term and it is commonly used in the media, literature and religious texts to refer to sexual intercourse, since any sex issues are regarded as highly sensitive topics in Arabic and many other cultures. The literal translation of this particular swear word would shock and deeply offend an Arabic audience. Therefore, both subtitlers have euphemized the obscene word and complied with the norms of the target culture. Since both subtitlers selected the same Arabic word to translate the swear word *fuck*, this indicates that the word needs to be toned down in order to be acceptable.

Another frequently used word in the film that poses a major challenge for subtitlers has connotations of incest, namely the word *motherfucker* and its various forms. The translation of this term into Arabic is problematic. In most cases, these terms are either omitted or euphemized beyond recognition. The following illustrates this issue:

Example 8:

- *English, motherfucker! Do you speak it?*

Prosub: الإنكليزية أيها السافل، هل تجيدها؟

[English, mean, are you good at it?]

Fansub: الإنكليزية "أيها اللعين، هل تتحدثها؟"

[English, damned. Do you speak it?]

In this example, *motherfucker* has been eliminated from the two subtitles and replaced by [mean] in the prosub and [damned] in the fansub version. These words are considered to be general and old-fashioned words. Neither of these words in the

subtitles suggests incest; nor do they belong to this type of insult. In the Arabic culture, this term is not only forbidden by religious teachings; culturally, it is both offensive and unacceptable. Therefore, both the prosubber and the fansubber have chosen the adaptation strategy, euphemising the word and toning it down so that the subtitles are acceptable to an Arabic audience and do not violate the norms and conventions of the target culture. According to Sagarin(1968), references to incest are considered to be more offensive than any other type of insult due to their

ability to incite aggressive anger even among people who have developed a defensive armor against the insults derived from obscenity. Perhaps mankind's overwhelming fear of incest is challenged when the word mother-fucker is heard; or perhaps the image of the mother as pure and inviolate is damaged when the tabooed sounds are spoken. Although an example of a term that is both sexually descriptive and figuratively insulting, mother-fucker seems to touch off such a sensitive area, even in the speaker and insulter, that it has not passed into the general language of taboos that are violated at the rate of several per minute. (1968, p.139-140),

The previous example is one of many examples where English swear words undergo a semantic shift when translated into Arabic. The words *fuck* and *motherfucker*, for instance, have sexual connotations, but when translated, these words have been rendered into Arabic words that belong to a different semantic field. This is evident in the case of the word *fuck* in the following example:

Example 9:

What a fucker!

Prosub: يا له من سافل

[What a mean],

Fansub: ياله من لعين

[What a damned]

The word *fucker* belongs to the domain of sexual activities but in the fansub version, the word was translated into [damned], which has religious connotations. Such shifts indicate that sexual references are one of the strictest taboos in Arabic culture and the use of religion-related words such as 'damned' is the preferred option of the fansubber. In the fansub version, the word [damned] has been used 55 times, but is used only 5 times in the prosub version. This tendency is not confined to the fansub version; it is also used in the prosub version but with different swear words and for different types of swearing. For instance, the word *shit* may be used for auxiliary and expletive swearing.

Despite the fact that using adaptation and generalization strategies to tone down the offensive words in the original dialogue is effective in overcoming the cultural differences regarding swearing, it has an adverse effect not only on the integrity of the source text and the film's characters, thereby jeopardising its success, but also on Arabic viewers who link the words they hear in the film to the subtitles that appear on the screen. For example, from personal observation, many teenagers repeat and imitate English swear words such as *fuck you*, *motherfucker* and *shit* that they hear in films in the wrong belief that these words mean “تبا لك” [may evil befall], or “لعين” [damned] and so forth. Therefore, as a result of the mistranslation of English swear words, viewers, particularly those who do not speak English at all, will have the wrong idea about the real meaning of English swear words. Due to the mistranslation of these

swear words, teenagers, who tend to watch films more than any other age group, use English swear words when speaking with their brothers and relatives. If young Arabs knew the exact meaning of words such as *motherfucker*, it is most unlikely that they would use them as these highly offensive obscenities are culturally and religiously unacceptable.

Consequently, subtitlers find themselves between the devil and the deep blue sea. If English swear words are translated literally, and the real semantic meaning is conveyed, the subtitle would violate the cultural and religious norms of the target language, and Arabs would consider such subtitles as offensive and insulting. If subtitlers replace such words with euphemisms, then this will be seen as a mistranslation that deceives the audience. In some subtitles, the swear words are 'beeped out' or replaced by symbols such as * or {@} to indicate that offensive words have been uttered which are not appropriate for the viewers to hear or read.

Furthermore, several Arabic words used in the fansubs tend to be more obscene than their counterparts in the prosubs. Put more precisely, the same English swear word is subtitled into two different words, and although both of them are euphemized, the degree of offensiveness is harsher in the fansub version than in the prosub one. For instance, note the treatment of the word *bitch* in the following example:

Example10:

- *Tell that bitch to chill!*

Prosub: قل لهذه السافلة أن تهدأ

[Tell that villain to chill]

Fansub: هذء العاهرة

[Chill the prostitute]

Comparing the two subtitles, it can be seen that the word *bitch* has been rendered in the fansub into العاهرة, which literally means prostitute, while in the prosub, the word is translated to السافلة [villain]. The two Arabic words used for the word *bitch* have been used in many cases with some exceptions of omissions, particularly in the prosubs. The word used in the fansub in the above example is far more obscene than its counterpart in the prosub. Although both subtitles are not as vulgar and offensive as the original one, the fansub translation is still far more offensive compared to the prosub version. Furthermore, the word chosen by the fansubber is an equivalent for the word (bitch) in Modern Standard Arabic. There are some other equivalent words but in regional dialects forms of Arabic not in the formal language, which is used for subtitling films. It is evident that the words chosen by the fansubber are more vulgar and obscene than those chosen by prosubber. Alkadi (2010) in his study conducted to measure the viewers' perceptions of subtitled swear words, found that many euphemized expressions were still seen as offensive by his study's Arabic participants who said that euphemized words need to be euphemized again in order to be acceptable.

In the following section, we examine how humorous swearing is subtitled in the prosubs and fansubs, and discuss the subtitling strategies adopted by the fansubber and the creator of the prosubs.

4.2.3 Humorous swearing

According to Andersson and Trudgill (1991), humorous swearing is not intended to be derogatory or abusive as this type of swearing uses swear words in a playful manner

intended to entertain rather than to insult others. It is normally uttered in relaxed settings and between friends. Although this type of swearing might initially seem to be abusive, its function is the opposite. The following figure provides an overview of the types of strategies employed by translators of humorous swearing.

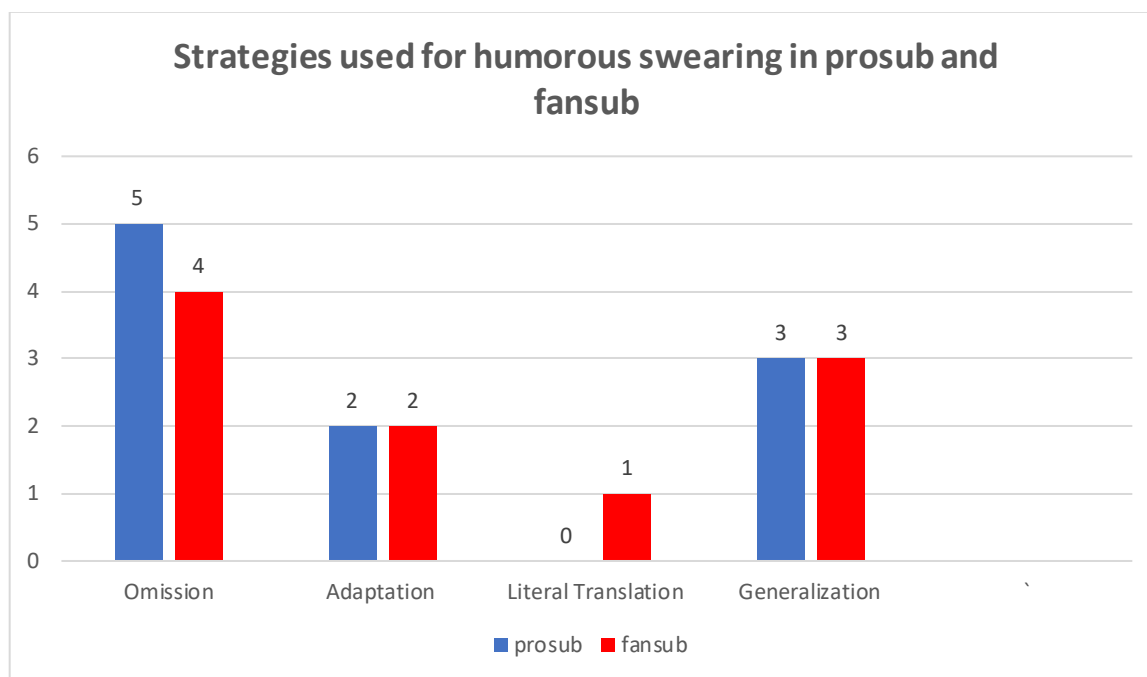


Figure 8: Strategies used for humorous swearing in prosubs and fansubs

From the graph above, we can see that omission is again the most dominant strategy used for humorous swearing, with five and four in the prosubs and fansubs respectively. The film contains 10 instances of humorous swearing, and this is the less frequent type of swearing found in the film. In the prosub version, half of the humorous swearing was eliminated when subtitled into Arabic, while 4 out of 10 were omitted in the fansub version. Both subtitles equally adopted generalization and adaptation strategies three times and two times respectively. On the other hand, literal translation was used only once in the fansub, but was not evident in the prosub. In general, from the quantitative perspective, there is no significant difference between the two subtitled versions in

terms of strategies used. Moreover, the number of instances is very small and therefore a conclusion cannot be drawn.

The meaning conveyed by a word depends entirely on the context in which it is used.

One of many examples is the word *nigger* which is used in the following example.

Example 11:

nigger, what's up with them clothes ?

Prosub: ما سبب ارتدائك هذه الملابس؟ [Why you wear these clothes?]

Fansub: يا رجل, من أين أتيت بهذه الملابس؟ [Oh man, from where you got this clothes?]

In this example, *nigger* was not translated literally in either subtitle. However, it was omitted in the prosub version, while the generalization strategy was used in the fansub version. In the fansub, the word *nigger* was translated as “man”. The possible reason could be that if the word were translated literally, it would have a negative, offensive connotation. On the other hand, the prosubber chose to omit this word in this case as s/he has translated the same word literally in other contexts. This indicates that neither subtitler is consistent when dealing with offensive words in the film.

Furthermore, many swear words are used to serve different functions, one of which is to emphasize a statement. Maintaining the function of swear words is of great importance in conveying the intended message of the film accurately. The evidence of maintaining the function of swearing can be clearly seen in the example below.

Example 12:

That's a pretty fuckin' good milkshake!

Prosub: هذا المخفوق اللبني لذيذ للغاية

[This milkshake is very delicious]

Fansub: !هذا مخفوق حليبي رائع

[This milkshake is wonderful]

The speaker used the word *fuckin'* to express his approval of the drink and it was spoken in a relaxed and comfortable setting where individuals were physically close to one another. In Example 12, it can be seen that the word *fuckin'* was used to serve the function of intensifying the English text. This function was not retained in the fansub, while the prosub used the word *للغاية* which means “extremely” to emphasize the statement. It can be claimed that the prosub version was more successful in maintaining the function of this swear word, although the swear word was omitted in the subtitle.

Even though omission was the most widely used strategy used in both subtitles, there are some cases where other strategies such as adaptation and generalization are used inconsistently in both subtitles. In other words, the fansubs may opt for omitting certain swear word while in the prosubs he/she maintains it or vice versa. Consider the following example

Example 13:

Oh, you feel better, motherfucker?

Prosub: تشعر بحالٍ أفضل الآن؟

[You are feeling better now?]

أتشعر بتحسّن أيّها اللعين ؟ Fansub

[Do you feel better, damn you]

In example 13, we can find that the swear word *motherfucker* was omitted altogether in the prosub. This word has indeed been deleted in many cases where the word is used for other types of swearing such as expletive, abusive and auxiliary swearing. This word seems to be offensive at first glance but the whole context determines the function of swearing. On the other hand, the fansubber tends to be more consistent in translating this word as he opted for the strategy of adaptation. The translation of this word becomes لعين(damned).

To conclude this part of swearing, it is obvious that the small number of humorous swearing was not sufficient to draw a conclusion on the manner the swearing expressions are subtitled into Arabic in the prosub and fansub versions. However, it can be claimed that both subtitlers dealt with swearing in a similar manner without taking the function of swearing. If the swearing is meant to be humorous, it is different from abusive swearing. Subtitlers should take such issue into account and select the words that serve such function accordingly.

Having discussed how expletives, abusive and humorous swearing are subtitled into Arabic, the final section of this chapter addresses auxiliary swearing.

4.2.4 Auxiliary Swearing

In this section, some examples which contain auxiliary swearing will be compared and discussed along with the two subtitled versions, namely the prosub and fansub versions.

Auxiliary swearing is normally free of emphatic and does not require an addressee. Additionally, auxiliary swearing is often free of negative feelings such as anger or frustration and it tends to be uttered among friends. It is worth noting that the context of a swear word is a key element for identifying the exact function of swearing.

Before proceeding to the strategies used in both subtitles, it will be necessary to shed some light on the most frequently English swear words that occurred in the film for auxiliary swearing. The most widely used word in the film is *fuck* and its variants, at 74 times, followed by the word *shit* which occurs 60 times. The words *ass* and *goddamn* placed third and fourth with 21 and 8 usages respectively. While the word *nigger* was used 5 times in the film. This word appears to be abusive but it is not so as the speaker and the listener are at closer distance from each other, and in many cases both the speaker and the listener are from African background. There are some words such as *damn*, *hell* and others, which occurred less than five times. These words altogether exemplify 12 words.

In the following figure, it is clearly observable that the omission strategy was dominant in the prosub and fansub versions by 138 and 131 times respectively. That means 77% of auxiliary swearing have been omitted in the prosubs while 73% in the fansub. Such huge reduction of the swearing in general and auxiliary ones in particular gives an indication that both subtitled versions adopted a target-oriented approach and comply with the sociopolitical and religious norms of the target culture. In the prosubs, the second most common strategy for translating auxiliary swearing is adaptation which was used 18 times, followed by generalization, used 17 times. On the other hand, it is apparent that the strategy of literal translation was used more frequently in the fansub version with 22 times compared to 7 times in the prosub version. In general, both

subtitles tend to be more conservative and thus most swearing instances have been omitted, euphemized and toned down, with some exception being the literal strategy that was used more often in the fansubs. Some examples of both subtitles will be presented and discussed to determine whether there is any significant difference between the two Arabic versions in terms of words selected.

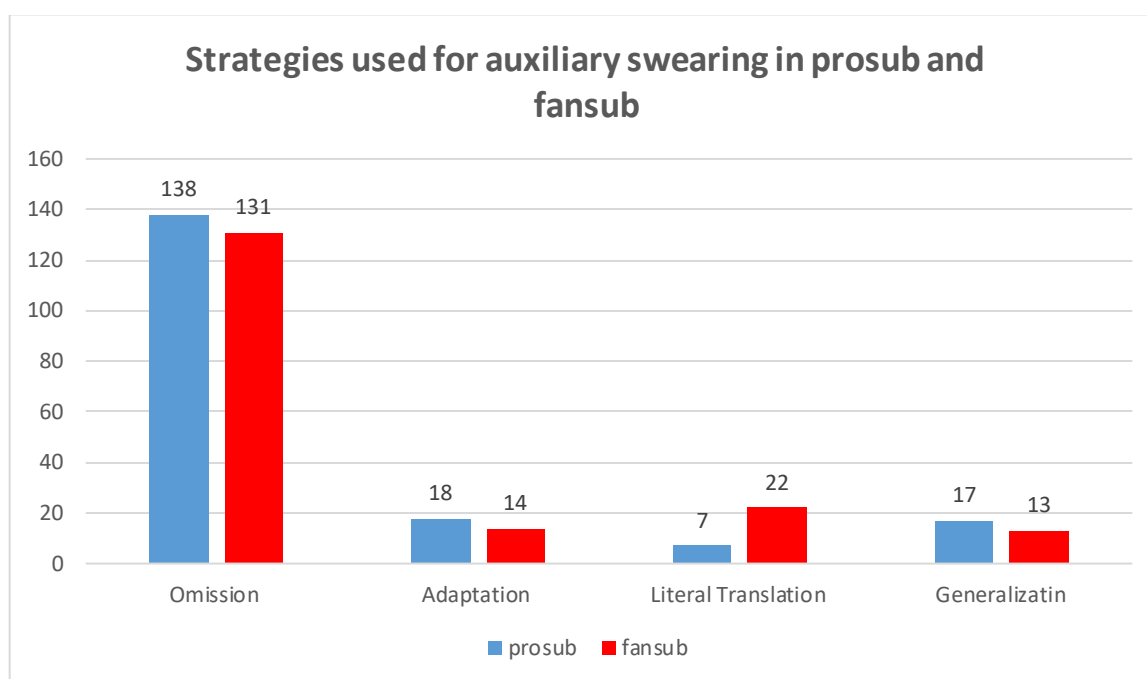


Figure 9: Strategies used for auxiliary swearing in prosubs and fansubs

Omission remains the most prevalent strategy employed by both the fansubber and the prosubber when the English swear words would be very offensive to an Arabic audience. Consider the following example:

Example No 14:

Now, that's a hard motherfuckin' fact of life. But that's a fact of life your ass is gonna have to get realistic about

Prosub : هذا واقع من الحياة يصعب تقبّله لكنه واقع يجدر بك تقبّله :

[This is a reality of life that is difficult to accept but a reality that you should accept]

Fansub: الآن, هذه هي أصعب حقيقة في الحياة ولكن هذه هي الحقيقة التي عليك التعايش معها :

[Now, this is the hardest truth in life but this is the truth that you have to live with]

As is evident in the example above, both the prosubber and the fansubber have omitted the words *motherfucking* and *ass* in the Arabic version. One reason for this may be that the prosubber and fansubber considered that this auxiliary swearing was gratuitous as it did not add meaning to the text or reveal much about the speaker's feelings. Generally, this type of swearing is eliminated from Arabic subtitles. Furthermore, American culture accepts the manner in which the English language can be used for swearing, and tolerates an excessive amount of swearing on TV. This is quite different from the Arabic language and culture in terms of tolerance and attitude.

The example below illustrates how auxiliary swearing was used and subtitled into Arabic. According to Andersson and Trudgill (1991,p.61), auxiliary swearing is often called “lazy swearing” and used to replace words and adjectives which require more time and effort to articulate. However, swearing in the Arabic culture is quite different from the American one as is evident in the following example.

Example 15:

Between good shit and bad shit, this is the house they come to.

Prosub: والذين يجيدون التمييز بين البضاعة الجيدة والبضاعة الرديئة يقصدون منزلي

[Those who are good at distinguishing between good goods and poor goods are coming to my home]

Fansub: بين البضاعة الجيدة والبضاعة السيئة فهذا هو المنزل الذي يقصدونه

[Between good goods and bad goods, this is the house they are coming to]

The word *shit* is used by the drug dealer who is trying to convince a customer that his drugs are of good quality and better than those of any other competitors. Here, *shit* refers to heroin. This type of swearing is quite common in the English language and culture but not so in Arabic culture, particularly since modern standard Arabic is used for the subtitling of films. However, auxiliary swearing is used in colloquial Arabic such as Egyptian, Tunisian and other regional dialects. In the subtitled versions, both the prosubber and fansubber have opted for omission as other options might be offensive and there is no equivalent word that has the same semantic function as the word *shit* which can be used to refer to several different items. If the statements were translated literally, they would be offensive and unacceptable to many Arabic viewers as they are not familiar with this type of swearing and may see it as gratuitous. Auxiliary swearing, particularly the word *shit*, when it is used to mean different things, is problematic for subtitlers. In many instances in the film, the word is often omitted in the Arabic subtitles, as there is no Arabic equivalent with the same language function. Moreover, Arabic culture is less tolerant of offensive expressions. The word *shit* was translated as “goods” in both versions. According to Khuddro (2000), translators tend to avoid the offensive words into Arabic by resorting to dynamic equivalence.

In many cases of auxiliary swearing, the swear words do not carry any additional semantic meaning; as Andersson and Trudgill (1990) suggest, this type of swearing is

a way of speaking that takes place unconsciously. The following is a good illustration of the excessive use of swear words in the film.

Example No 16

*We gotta be real **fuckin'** delicate with this Jimmie situation. He's one remark away from kickin' our **asses** out the door.*

Prosub: علينا أن نتعامل بدقة بالغة مع (جيمي)، إن تقوّهنا بما يزعجه، سيرمي بنا خارجاً

[We have to deal very carefully with (Jimmy), if we say something that bothers him, he will throw us out]

Fansub : علينا أن نتعامل بلطف مع (جيمي) هنا إنه على وشك أن يطردنا من المنزل :

[We have to deal gently with (Jimmy) here that he is about to drive us out of the house]

There are two swear words, namely *fucking* and *ass*. The former is the most commonly used swear word in the film and serves different functions. In this example, it does not enrich the meaning. In this example, both the fansubber and the prosubber omitted the swear words altogether. The reason for this might be that both subtitlers might have considered the above-mentioned swear words as being gratuitous, adding nothing to the text or the plot. Hjort (2009) notes that many swear words do not carry semantic significance as well as being undesirable in many cultures. Moreover, the subtitlers might have deleted the swear words in the example above due to spatio-temporal constraints, as swear words in this example carry little semantic value. However, Technical reasons cannot be a plausible justification for deleting about two-thirds of English swearing. In addition, there were several cases where English swear words are

uttered in the film, yet there were no subtitles at all shown on the screen. The logical justification for such omissions is the conformity to cultural factors that compel subtitlers to avoid any traces of offensiveness in the subtitled versions.

On the other hand, it might be argued that the excessive use of swearing in the film is not gratuitous. In other words, it is essential to the plot and to conveying the director's intended message and characterizations. Moreover, the frequent use of swear words may indicate the social class and the background of the swearer. In the case of *Pulp Fiction*, the excessive use of obscenities was a major factor in ensuring the success of the film as pointed out by Soler Pardo (2011).

It has already been pointed out that in many the cases, the prosubber and the fansubber are not consistent when dealing with certain swear words, and that also happens in the case of auxiliary swearing. In other words, the same swear words are translated literally, or in some instances are euphemized, or eliminated in others. One of many examples is the word *nigger*, which has been rendered in many cases in both subtitles as "زنجي" which is a literal translation of the swear word. However, in some cases the same swear word is adapted, or omitted on other occasions. Consider the following example:

Example 17:

*Chill them **niggers** out and wait for the Wolf, who should be coming directly.*

Prosub : غد إلى الداخل وهدي من روع الجميع لأنني سأرسل (وورف) وسيحضر على الفور :

[Go back inside and chill out of everyone's horror, as I will send the Wolf and he will come immediately]

Fansub: أذهب إلى هناك وهدّئهم، وانتظر سلاح الفرسان الذي من المفترض أن يصل مباشرةً

[Go there and chill them out, and wait until the weapon of knights who will come directly]

It is notable that both subtitles have omitted the offensive word *nigger* in this instance. As mentioned earlier, the same word has been translated literally in some cases, but in this case, both the prosubber and the fansubber opt for omission. The reason behind such inconsistency might be the lack of knowledge regarding the context and the connotation of a certain word. In this case, the intended meaning of the word *nigger* may vary significantly according to the status of the speaker and the listener, and their racial background(s). For instance, if the speaker and the listener are friends and both are from an African background, then this word is not offensive and is commonly used between African-Americans. However, in both subtitles, the word *nigger* was not translated consistently and the context of the word and its severity and harshness were not fully considered.

Generalization has also been used in both subtitles to deal with several offensive idiomatic expressions in the film. If we look at Example 18 below, we can see the swear word *dick* has been euphemized in both subtitles, erasing any traces of obscenity. This strategy might be useful when idiomatic swearing expressions are used and when there is no equivalent in the Arabic language that has the same degree of offensiveness and can be acceptable to Arabic viewers. Moreover, adopting a generalization is probably more effective than omitting all swear words that occur in the film, thereby destroying the tone and the style of the film as well as its characters.

Example 18:

Well, let's not start sucking each other's dicks quite yet.

Prosub : دعونا لا نبدأ بالمجاملات الآن :

[Let's not start with complimenting now]

Fansub : حسناً، دعنا لا نتملق بعضنا البعض بعد

[Well, let's not flatter each other yet]

4.3 Summary of the findings

To conclude, it was found in this study that omission is the most extensively used strategy for swear words in the prosub and fansub versions of the film *Pulp Fiction*. About two-thirds of the swear words in the film have been eliminated from the two Arabic subtitles. The findings of this study match those observed in earlier studies, conducted in European contexts such as those of Karjalainen (2002), Kizeweter,(2005), Greenall (2008), Ghassempur (2009), Pujol (2006), Pardo (2011), Lie (2013) and Nguyen (2015), and on Asian context by scholars such as Chen (2004) Han & Wang (2014). These findings indicate that many cultures, including the Arabic, censor swear words and taboo expressions when subtitling although the extent to which those cultures tolerate swear words varies significantly. Athamneh and Zitawi (1999, p.135) point out that omission is one of the most common strategies used by translators to remove obscene words from Arabic dubbed versions. They add that “—Such omissions do not fall under the category of errors; rather they reflect the translators’ conscious attempts to adapt the text in accordance with cultural, social, and marketing considerations”.

Both the prosubber and fansubber have, to a great extent, produced a readable and fluent subtitle which complies with the norms of the target culture and is free from foreignising aspects. This is evident from the huge reduction of swear words in the subtitled versions. About two-thirds of the swearing has been omitted in order to conform to Arabic cultural norms. Most of the remaining third has been either euphemised or toned down, which is considered a form of domestication. Roughly 3% and 13% of English swear words have been subtitled using the strategy of literal translation in the prosub and fansub versions, respectively. Consequently, it can be claimed confidently that both subtitled versions are domesticated to best fit the norms of the target culture. However, there have been some cases where the foreignization approach was used, not with swearing, but with issues such as the names of characters in the film, names of places, and other cultural specific names.

Moreover, Modern Standard Arabic, which is the language of the media and subtitled films, tends to be formal, thereby preventing subtitlers from translating offensive expressions. In addition, if many of swear words were translated literally and freely, most if not all Arab audiences would find the subtitles not only culturally and religiously inappropriate, but also awkward and unidiomatic. Furthermore, the huge reduction in the number of swearing expressions in the Arabic subtitled versions of *Pulp Fiction*, may be due to linguistic restrictions not censorship imposed by governmental institutions. This can be easily seen from the quantitative analysis of the fansub version and the manner in which swear words are subtitled. In other words, fansubbers tend to have more freedom due to the absence of imposed and official censorship and restrictions, the anonymity of the creators of the fansubs, and so forth. Such circumstance and advantages are not available to the creators of prosubs.

Therefore, to some extent it can be claimed that the features of Modern Standard Arabic language present a major challenge to subtitlers who may wish to remain as faithful as possible to the original text.

This study found that the strategies used in the prosub and fansub versions are not consistent. In many cases, the swear word with the same function as the pragmatic word is translated by using different strategies. This affects the quality of the subtitle, as in some instances, the subtitled swear words not only do not match the intended obscenity, but also do not match the intended level of emotion shown on the screen, such as the anger expressed in expletive swearing.

It is worth noting that the lack of significant difference between the two versions is somewhat surprising, and that it would seem that linguistic, cultural and religious norms are sufficiently strong to ensure that even the non-regulated fansubs are much less explicit in terms of swear words in spite of the anonymity of the subtitler and the lack of control. Despite there being no significant difference between the strategies used in the fansubs and prosubs, it was found that the fansubber and the prosubber tend to prefer certain words over others for English swear words. In general, the words chosen by the fansubber are to some extent more obscene than their counterparts in the prosub version. The words العاهرة [prostitute] and اللعين [damned] are more vulgar than the word سافل [villain].

It therefore seems that both subtitlers tended to avoid the use of offensive words, with one of the reasons being that swear words in a written form are stronger than spoken ones. Moreover, swearing is usually expressed in informal language, but when it is subtitled into Arabic, the formal Modern Standard Arabic is used. This shift presents a considerable challenge for subtitlers. Apart from the cultural norms of the target

language having to be considered, the transition from dialect to formal register and the stronger obscenity of written words compared to spoken ones, have significantly affected the options available to subtitlers of the prosub and the fansub versions. Hence, the vast majority of English swear words have been omitted in the Arabic subtitled versions.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

The concept of swearing is a sensitive and controversial issue in many cultures. Even though swearing is used to serve different functions and to express a full range of feelings, and is used by many on a daily basis, swearing has still not yet been extensively studied in the academic field, particularly in the context of audiovisual translation.

Due to the prevalence of swearing in popular films such as those produced in Hollywood, it is a linguistic phenomenon that presents significant issues in cross-cultural adaptation when these films are translated for contexts where swearing is further from the norm, and is considered taboo. There is no doubt that languages express swearing in different ways, and to a large extent, this is culturally determined. Thus, the translation of swear words poses a thorny challenge in interlingual subtitling due to a combination of cultural, ideological and technical constraints. The degree to which cultures tolerate such expressions varies significantly, so that expressions which are acceptable in one culture are considered offensive in another.

Furthermore, subtitling is different from all other modes of audiovisual translation in that subtitlers need to shift the text from spoken to written form, in addition to having spatio-temporal constraints. This may mean that the original dialogue will be reduced considerably, which in turn will affect various features and characteristic of the dialogue such as swearing. Hence, this study attempted to shed light on the linguistic transfer of swear words in American films from English into Arabic. Furthermore, it explored whether the fansub version is more inclined to adopt a foreignizing approach

when dealing with swear words, owing to the nature of fansubbing where the subtitle creators are anonymous and there are no official restrictions and censorship. This study identified the translation strategies adopted to render swear words into Arabic in the prosub and fansub versions of *Pulp Fiction*, and investigated whether there is a significant difference between the two subtitled versions regarding the translation of swear words.

5.2 Research findings

This study was conducted to investigate the translation strategies employed when rendering swear words into Arabic in the prosub and fansub versions of the film *Pulp Fiction*. The results show that only four strategies were used in the two subtitled versions, namely omission, adaptation, literal translation and generalisation. Of those strategies, omission is the most dominant strategy adopted by almost 68%, and 62% of English swear words in the prosub and fansub versions respectively. It can be confidently stated that cultural norms and the usage of Modern Standard Arabic in the subtitles are the major reasons for such a significant reduction in the number of swear words in the two subtitles.

Also, the employment of strategies in both subtitled versions was not consistent; the same swear word might be subtitled differently throughout the film. Both subtitlers show a preference for using certain words for English swear words and it was evident that the words selected by the fansubber tend to be more obscene. It has also already been pointed out that there is a significant statistical difference between the types of swearing (expletive, abusive, humorous, and auxiliary) and the translation strategies used, yet there was no significant difference between the prosubs and fansubs regarding

the effect of swearing types and the strategies adopted. This may simply be an artefact of the small sample size that will have to be borne out in larger studies using corpora, but on the basis of this case study it would seem that the differences, although present, are not as pronounced as might be expected.

5.3 Implication

Some potential implications can be drawn from the analysis and findings of this study. Since this study dealt with the issue of swearing which is a sensitive topic in some cultures, it might raise the awareness of cultural norms and their impact on the final product in contexts other than Europe and America. This study might be useful in raising the awareness among subtitlers of the essential role of cultural norms and their impact on the final subtitling product. Subtitling entails more than mastering two languages; it requires a greater awareness of the source and target cultures, and an in-depth knowledge of the extrinsic factors that might influence the process of subtitling. This study also presented the theoretical background of swearing and discussed how swearing can be used to serve certain functions not only for abusive purposes, but for other purposes which are categorised as auxiliary or humorous.

Another implication of this study might be that the excessive use of omission is often not justifiable. There are many instances where strategies such as compensation, euphemising or even neutralising the swearing expressions would be more effective than just eliminating the swear words. The swear words in the dialogue tend to carry social, cultural, and semantic connotations and implications, and in some cases, swearing is a fundamental element in the success of the film. It is also important in

terms of the setting and characterization in the film. Therefore, these values should be taken into account when translating offensive words in subtitles.

5.4 Limitations of the research and implications for future study

The classification proposed by Andersson and Trudgill was to some extent limited. There are many cases of offensive instances that do not fit into the swearing functions adopted in this study. There were some instances where sexual and religious references are uttered and considered offensive in the target culture but not so in English. Such references do not belong to any of the four functions of swearing which makes the classification unable to accommodate the complexity of taboo language. Besides, there are some issues pertaining to the comparison of the prosubs and fansubs of *Pulp Fiction*. First, the time and place where the fansub version was created are unidentified, which in turn will have an impact on the final subtitles. To put it precisely, we do not know when the fansub version was subtitled, and this can be a problematic issue when comparing two subtitles which belong to different historical periods. Also, we need to know in which Arabic countries the subtitling was conducted, as Arabic countries and cultures vary to some extent in terms of official censorship and the extent to which each Arabic sub-culture tolerates swear words.

Even though the model proposed by Tomaszekiewicz has been used effectively in few studies, it has also some shortcomings. For example, the definitions of adaptation strategies according to this model may overlap with neutralization strategies in some features. This makes the classification of translation strategies used more challenging in some cases. A more developed model of translation strategies might be vital to

accommodate the complexity of swear words although this is beyond the scope of the current study.

Since the data for this study was derived from one film, a large-scale corpus study of subtitles and fansubs would add significant value, especially if reference corpora of literary texts and spoken language were involved. Also, conducting a diachronic investigation of how taboo language was translated in different historical eras may produce valuable results. It is also useful to compare a written translated work with its subtitled or dubbed version to explore how swear words are rendered in these two genres, and whether the nature of audiovisual materials affects how translators deal with obscene words. Such studies would yield significant results that contribute to the aim of generalisability, enabling researchers to draw conclusions with greater certainty.

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