

## A Comparative Study of Cultural and Linguistic Adaptation in Two Arabic Subtitle Versions of The Father (2020)

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### Abstract:

The world today is witnessing an increasing expansion in the realm of the streaming platforms, which consequently leads to an urgent need to have high-quality audiovisual translation, especially subtitling. This requirement underlines a crucial issue, which is how to translate culturally specific expressions such as idioms and proverbs, and there is a serious gap of research in comparative studies of how professional subtitlers cope with this issue among Arabic-speaking viewers. To fill this gap, the present work examines the Arabic versions of *The Father* (2020)—an American movie—using a qualitative comparative approach with the two different approaches taken by the two translators (Mohammad Al-Nuaimi and Nizar Ezzeddine) as the subject of the analysis. Based on a systematic analytical model that is based on functional equivalence, domestication, and foreignization, the study classifies and judges the translator adaptations of the chosen idiomatic and culturally specific utterances. It is evident that the analysis suggests opposing strategic profiles, as one translator is always inclined towards domestication as a tool to acquire cultural fluency, whereas the other is inclined to foreignize at the expense of pragmatism and legibility. Offering empirical information about these strategic options, this study fills the gap between translation theory and practice with valuable information on the nuances of adaptation in modern subtitling.

**Keywords:** *The Father* (2020), *Audiovisual Translation*, *Subtitling*, *Domestication*, *Foreignization*, *Arabic Subtitles*, *Functional Equivalence*.

## Introduction

The appearance of worldwide streaming services such as Netflix has radically altered the distribution of audiovisual information, and it has resulted in an unprecedented level of demand for high-quality subtitles that can overcome the language and cultural differences. Film translation, especially subtexting, is no longer a fringe academic issue but one of the main constituents of the global media ecosystem. It is very instrumental in rendering content readable to people of multilingual backgrounds, and a delicate balance between lingo and context sensitivity is required. This difficulty is most severe in the translation of proverbs and idiomatic phrases, linguistic devices with very strong roots in a source culture that are sometimes very difficult to translate directly and literally. An overly literal subtitle can be meaningless, whereas an overly adapted subtitle can be bland. As such, the translators are always faced with the dilemma of deciding whether to stick to the principles of formal equivalence (word-to-word accuracy) or functional equivalence (expression of the intended effect and meaning in the target society).

Although the field is accepted to be important, a major research gap has been identified in the empirical research undertaken regarding how professional translators integrate these challenges in their practice, especially in the case of high-profile films for Arabic-speaking audiences. Although the theoretical literature on adaptation strategies is rich, comparative case-study studies, which analyze the difference in the strategic decisions of various translators of the same source material, are scarce. Such absence of comparative analysis prejudices our knowledge of the variety of the potential solutions and the aspects that can guide a translator in his/her choice process in practical situations.

This research finds a way to fill this gap with the help of a comparative analysis of the strategies of cultural and linguistic adaptation used in the Arabic subtitles of the Academy Award-winning movie *The Father* (2020). In particular, it compares and contrasts the work of two professional translators, Mohammad Al-Nuaimi and Nizar Ezzeddine, to determine the tendencies in the way they approached culturally specific terms and idioms as well as emotionally driven dialog. This study aims to clarify the practical issues of audiovisual translation by comparing their translations systematically to assess how various methods of adapting the work can be effective. In order to inform this investigation, the study is guided by the following research questions and objectives:

### Research Questions:

1. How do the translators employ cultural and linguistic adaptation strategies when subtitling proverbs and idiomatic expressions in *The Father*?
2. What culture-specific terms and hidden meanings in the film pose translation challenges, and why are they difficult to render into Arabic?

3. To what extent do Mohammad Al-Nuaimi and Nizar Ezzedine prioritize functional equivalence (meaning) over literal accuracy (form) in their respective Arabic versions?

### **Research Objectives:**

1. To identify how translators employ cultural and linguistic adaptation strategies when subtitling proverbs and idiomatic expressions in films.
2. To analyze the culture-specific terms and hidden meanings in *The Father* (2020) that are difficult to translate word-for-word into Arabic, and to understand why they pose translation challenges.
3. To find out how much Mohammad Al-Nuaimi and Nizar Ezzedine focus on meaning (functional equivalence) instead of word-for-word translation (literal accuracy) in their Arabic versions.

There are two implications of this study. In theory, it adds to the field of Translation Studies, offering empirical evidence of the usage of adaptation strategies in a modern, high-stakes media environment. In practice, it provides useful information to translators, subtitlers, and translation teachers regarding the good practices and pitfalls in translating idiomatic language. The results are expected to promote a more conscious and situation-sensitive prerogative of subtitling, which will inevitably lead to the improvement of Arabic subtitles and will contribute to the enjoyment of the audience worldwide.

## **Literature Review**

### **2.1 From Linguistic Equivalence to Functional Purpose in Translation Studies**

Translation Studies (TS) has changed greatly as compared to the initial emphasis on linguistic equivalence, which emphasized the importance of word-to-word or form-to-form correspondence. Although the standard theorists such as Newmark (1988) considered translation as the transfer of meaning as it was meant by the original author, it was problematic in the real practice of this principle, particularly when dealing with complicated texts. According to Nida (2001), professional translators can find the narrow, theoretical prescriptions very unrealistic, and they tend to consider the communicative purpose of written communication of a text more important than literal accuracy. This conflict between the process and product and form and meaning has precipitated some paradigm shift towards a more functionalist approach.

The cardinal element of this functionalist turn is the idea of functional equivalence, best known due to Nida, which states that the translation must elicit a reaction in the target audience that is in a substantial sense identical to the reaction elicited in the source audience. This principle was expanded by Vermeer to Skopos theory, which argues that the translation strategy is dictated by the purpose (or skopos) of a translation. According to this perspective, a translation is not evaluated in terms of

its faithfulness to the original text but in terms of its suitability to its intended use in the new culture. The importance of this theoretical change on this study is that it presents the key lens of analysis. It directly answers **Research Objective 3**, which tries to find out the degree to which the translators are concerned with meaning (functional equivalence) rather than literal accuracy. Using this framework, we will be able to leave behind a simplified right/wrong dichotomy and consider the decisions of the translators in terms of their success in making the film rich in its dramatic and emotional meaning to the Arabic-speaking audience.

Based on recent empirical studies using Skopos and functionalist paradigms to explain audiovisual translation, it is found that the effectiveness of quality evaluation in translation can be better assessed in terms of audience effects and communicative intent as opposed to formal equivalence. As an illustration, the functionalist study of the Arabic dubbing reveals that the translators tend to follow the hierarchy of cultural accessibility and practicality in relation to the desired objective of the target text (Evaluating Translation Strategies in Arabic Dubbing, 2025).

## **2.2 The Cultural Dilemma: Domestication and Foreignization**

There is no way that a functional approach compels translators to address the issue of cultural differences, especially when it comes to culture-specific items (CSIs) such as idioms, proverbs, and social customs. According to Bassnett (1991), the two cannot be separated, and any attempt to translate something without regard to the other runs the risk of having a linguistically correct text that is culturally anemic. This dilemma is usually placed as a dilemma between two strategic extremes: domestication and foreignization.

This process of altering the original text to suit the cultural values and beliefs of the target group is what Venuti has referred to as domestication in order to familiarize and render easy accessibility of the source text. Conversely, foreignization aims at keeping the source text as the foreign one, purposely imposing a burden on the target reader in terms of cultural and linguistic disparities. This is strengthened by Bastin (2014), who places adaptation as a central communication strategy towards the solution of such cultural gaps, observing that it is a context-based and not text-based solution. These decisions are not purely technical since they are acts of ideology whose choice is an expression of the attitude of the translator (or the person who commissions it) towards the source culture. This framework is necessary to respond to Research Objective 1, because it would give the necessary vocabulary to categorize and discuss the cultural and linguistic adaptation strategies used by Al-Nuaimi and Ezzeddine. Their example of the translations of the term "chin-up," one of them translating it as an Arabic idiomatic meaning of encouragement (domestication) and the other as a literal physical order (foreignization), can be systematically tested in this theoretical opposition.

The current study of subtitling still reflects the role of domestication and foreignization as compatible and not as antagonistic approaches. The recent case study of subtitle translation in the historical drama shows that successful subtitling involves the skill of a translator to switch between the strategy of domestication and foreignization depending on the cultural density, the genre, and the expectation of the audience (Application of Domestication and Foreignization Strategies in Subtitle Translation, 2025).

This fact is supported by a systematic review of the interlingual subtitling studies, stating domestication and foreignization as the persistent analytical concepts on both interlinguistic and audiovisual levels (Domestication and Foreignization in Interlingual Subtitling, 2025).

### **2.3 The Specific Context: Constraints and Adaptation in Audiovisual Translation**

These speculations are especially acute in the very context of Audiovisual Translation (AVT), and subtitling specifically. Subtitling is a restrained mode of translation, as Luyken et al. (1991) note, which is very limited in space and time. Limited space on the screen and the number of characters required brevity, and the necessity to align the text with the speech and visuals does not leave much space for elaborate explanations or word-to-word translations of complicated idioms. Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997) introduce the concept of subtitling when describing its process of creating synchronized captions, with this technical aspect being emphasized.

Other recent corpus-based analyses of English-Arabic and Arabic-English subtitling also show that translators modify items specific to a culture, where there are strict spatial and time constraints, often relying on explication, paraphrase, and cultural replacement to ensure a functional match (Corpus-Based Study of Arabic Audiovisual Translation, 2024). Comparative research of human- and machine-generated subtitles shows that the functional decisions made by human translators in audiovisual translation are usually not pragmatic and culturally sensitive, which is why the role of human translators and their functional decision-making is so significant in the research (PLOS ONE, 2024).

These limitations compel subtitlers to be tactical researchers. According to O'Connell (2007), the main role is to enhance the original soundtrack, and this implication means that the subtitle is supposed to be understood immediately. This can often require the application of more than just simple translation as adaptation strategies. Adaptation is not an undesired deviation, as it is being argued by Gambier and Gottlieb (2001), but rather an indispensable element of efficient AVT. It enables the translator to create functional equivalence through condensing, paraphrasing, or replacing cultural allusions so that the message can be communicated clearly and effectively as per the constraints of the medium. The context is critical in interpreting the issues found in **Research Objective 2** that dwells on the reasons behind some

words being hard to translate in *The Father*. The challenge has little to do with the words themselves and more to do with the inability to create full meaning and cultural appeal within the rigorous time-space factors of subtitling.

As an addition to the functionalist models, relevance-theoretic models of English-Arabic subtitling posit that translators should consider cognitive effects and processing load, especially in time-limited media like subtitles (*English-Arabic Subtitling: A Relevance-Theoretic Approach*, 2022).

#### **2.4 Research Gap and the role played by the current study.**

Although the literature offers a solid theoretical approach to the knowledge of the translation strategies, which range between functional equivalence and domestication/foreignization, and offers a clear account of the limitations of AVT, there exists a substantial gap in the empirical evidence. A significant part of the current research is either theoretical or deals with the language pair or media texts besides the contemporary Arabic film subtitling. Comparative case-study studies where such theoretical models have been rigidly and systematically applied to the work of various professional translators addressing the same high-profile source text are still relatively lacking.

This research paper will thus attempt to bridge this gap. This study, by making a qualitative side-by-side comparison of two different Arabic subtitle translations of a widely regarded film, *The Father* (2020), shifts the theoretical to the practical level of the research. It will explore the way Mohammad Al-Nuaimi and Nizar Ezzeddine navigate the relationship between functional objectives, cultural predicaments, and technical limitations. Through the findings, it will be able to offer tangible, empirical data on how adaptation strategies may be employed in a high-stakes, real-life context, which is generally valuable to both translation studies and the professional practice of Arabic subtitling of international streaming services

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This research design is that of a qualitative comparative case study. This is the best method to use in fulfilling the research objectives due to a number of reasons. To begin with, a case study approach enables an in-depth and comprehensive study of the many-layered, real-world phenomenon, such as the process of subtitling, in its context (Yin, 2018). The film *The Father* (2020) and two of its official Arabic translations as subtitles serve as the limits of the case. Second, the comparative aspect is at the center of the research questions, as it allows direct systematic study of the strategic decisions of two distinct professional translators subjected to the same problems in the source text. Lastly, the qualitative approach is critical due to the fact that it is not concerned with the measurement of linguistic characteristics

but rather the nature, quality, and reason of adaptation strategies as well as their ability to retain meaning, tones, and cultural complexity.

### **3.2 Data Source and Corpus**

The ultimate source of data in this study is the 2020 movie *The Father*, directed by Florian Zeller. The article analyzes two separate official Arabic subtitle tracks that were released on streaming sites, one of which was translated by Mohammad Al-Nuaimi and the other one by Nizar Ezzeddine. The last corpus of fourteen utterances is chosen out of the dialogue in the movie and is marked as the utterances with important cultural, linguistic, and pragmatic issues. These utterances were thus deemed to be quite appropriate in exploring the subtitling and adaptation strategies in an audiovisual translation scenario.

### **3.3 Sampling Strategy and Selection Criteria**

This research utilized the purposeful sampling technique in order to select utterances rich in information that would have a deep understanding of the research problem. As per qualitative research ethics, the emphasis was made on analytical depth and not on statistical representativeness (Patton, 2015). It was a systematic and criterion-based process: The researcher watched the entire film in order to detect the difficulties in translation, and on the basis of this work, a final sample was chosen, which consisted of fourteen utterances. The data chosen had four broad categories. Idiomatic phrases were added due to their figurative nature, which cannot be translated literally, and thus it is especially difficult when an audiovisual translation is needed. The specificity of the items (CSIs) was chosen because it is highly cultural and has no direct counterparts in Arabic, which means that there are no direct strategies to translate it. To study the ability of implied meaning and illocutionary force, the pragmatically complex utterances that include irony, sarcasm, or emotion were selected to study the conveyance of the pragmatic complex utterances within the limits of the subtitling. Eventually, metaphorical expressions were added since they are based on non-literal, analogical meaning and represent culturally based conceptual patterns, providing an insight into the translation of abstract meaning. The 14 utterances selected were done to give a sample of these categories in various moments of narration and emotional tones of the film.

### **3.4 Data Analysis Framework**

The analysis of the data was carried out in a systematic, multi-step process aimed at providing the analytical rigor and methodological transparency. The structure was formulated by combining the proven models of translation research with the limitations of the translation practice and technicalities of audiovisual translation. During the processing phase of the first stage, data extraction and tabulation, all fourteen selected utterances were time-stamped in the exact second of their

appearance in the film. The original text (ST) and the two translated texts, TT1 translated by Mohammad Al-Nuaimi and TT2 translated by Nizar Ezzeddine, were copied in a comparative table. A third column with the literal meaning of the original statement was added to help more easily evaluate the extent of adaptation used in each translation, which is a typical feature of the contrastive translation analysis (Munday, 2016).

The identification and classification of translation strategies was the second stage. In order to analyze how the translators go about their decision-making, a typology of translation strategies was developed using largely the classical translation procedures suggested by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) with minor modifications to accommodate the particular needs of the subtitling of culturally bound and idiomatic language. Translated utterances were then grouped in terms of the strategy or strategies that were used so as to provide a systematic comparison of the two subtitles using the audiovisual context.

**Table 1. Analytical Framework for Categorizing Translation Strategies**

<b>Strategy Category</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>1. Literal Translation</b>	One-to-one translation in which the source language structure and wording is retained.
<b>2. Cultural Substitution</b>	Substituting a culture-specific item with a target-language item with a similar functional meaning.
<b>3. Paraphrase (Explication)</b>	Re-expressing the meaning of the original articulation with alternative words which frequently render tacit data open.
<b>4. Modulation</b>	Reorienting the point of view, attention, or cognitive type of the source expression (e.g. switching abstract and concrete).
<b>5. Condensation</b>	The reduction of the expression of the source to meet spatial or temporal limitations of subtitling.
<b>6. Omission</b>	The entire elimination of a source-text component that is considered as being beyond translation or being unnecessary to the target audience.
<b>7. Mistranslation</b>	An interpretation that does not represent the essence of the original text, in most cases because of false interpretation.

### **Step 3: Evaluation of Strategies**

The chosen strategies were measured against the theoretical framework described in the literature review after they were categorized, and it was specifically functional equivalence in the audiovisual translation situation (Nida, 2001). The different strategies were evaluated based on four criteria that are linked. Pragmatic accuracy initially focused on whether the translation was effective in communicating the aim of the speaker in his communication, e.g., irony, apology, or insult (Hatim and Mason, 1997). Second, the cultural resonance was tested on the degree of how natural and accessible the adaptation was to an Arab-speaking audience and appropriately balanced domestication and foreignization (Pedersen, 2011). Third, emotional effect took into account the preservation of emotional tone and emotional intensity of the original performance, which is of primary importance in engaging viewers of subtitles in media (Chaume, 2012). Lastly, compliance with technical constraints evaluated the multidimensionality of translation with respect to subtitling limitations, including

shortness, readability, and the dialogue synchrony with what was occurring on-screen (Gottlieb, 1992).

With the systematic use of this framework, the research goes past mere description to include a solid, theory-based analysis of the strategic elements of the translators and how they affect the final product.

## Results

This part is the systematic result of the comparative study of the two Arabic subtitle versions of *The Father* (2020). The analysis will concern 14 chosen utterances that are recognized to have idiomatic expressions, culture-specific items, and pragmatically complex language. It also displays the source text (ST) and the target texts (TT) of Mohammad Al-Nuaimi and Nizar Ezzeddine. The descriptions below give an objective text of the translation strategies that were witnessed concerning both instances.

**Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Selected Utterances in *The Father* (2020)**

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT) - By Nizar Ezzeddine	Target Text (TT) - By Mohammed Al-Nuaimi	Time (Sec.)
<b>Pardon me for breathing</b>	اعذريني للحظة (Excuse me for a moment)	سامحيني على ردي القاسي (Forgive my harsh reply)	7:24
<b>World is turning</b>	الأرض تدور (The Earth spins)	لم يحدث أي شيء للعالم (Nothing has changed in the world)	7:34
<b>I put my foot in it?</b>	هل اخرجتك (Did I embarrass you?)	هل افسدت الامر (Did I ruin things?)	16:45
<b>Oops-a-daisy</b>	اسف جدا (Very sorry)	بنسا (How wretched!)	16:57
<b>Chin-up</b>	ارفع رأسك (Raise your head)	ابتهج (Be joyful)	16:59
<b>They all end up eating sooner or later</b>	كلهم ينتهي بهم الامر بالمغادرة عاجلا ام اجلا (They all end up leaving sooner or later)	حتما ستفشل علاقتهما (Their relationship will inevitably fail)	17:00
<b>She is cooking something up</b>	انها تطبخ شيء ما (She is cooking food)	انها تخطط لشيء ما (She is planning something)	18:50
<b>Please make yourself comfortable</b>	من فضلك خذ راحتك (Please take your ease)	حسننا البيت بيتك (Fine, the house is your house)	27:13
<b>Her mother was the soberest woman...</b>	أمها كانت أكثر امرأة رصينة قابلتها (Her mother was the most dignified woman I've met)	أمها كانت أكثر امرأة متزنة على الاطلاق (Her mother was the most balanced woman ever)	30:06
<b>Her unbearable habit of laughing inanely</b>	عادتها التي لا تطاق في الضحك بلا سبب (Her unbearable habit of laughing for no reason)	عادتها التي لا تطاق بالضحك بلا هوادة (Her unbearable habit of laughing relentlessly)	32:10
<b>I had you there, didn't I?</b>	هزمتك هذه المرة (I defeated you this time)	تمكنت منك، اليس كذلك (I got you, didn't I?)	32:20
<b>All I want is forever to fuck off</b>	كل ما أريد أن يغرب الجميع عن وجهي (I want everyone to vanish from my sight)	كل ما أريد هو أن يتركني الجميع وشأني (I just want everyone to leave me alone)	34:32
<b>Could you be more discreet</b>	هل يمكنك ان تكون أكثر سرية (Could you be more secretive/private?)	هل يمكنك ان تكون أكثر تحفظا (Could you be more reserved?)	40:30
<b>How much longer...hang around...</b>	كم من الوقت تنوي التسكع هنا وإزعاج الجميع (How long do you intend to loiter here and bother everyone?)	كم تنوي من الوقت ان تبقى تعتال على الجميع (How long do you intend to freeload on everybody?)	1:08:12

#### 4.1 Translation of Irony and Pragmatically Charged Utterances

The analysis identified several instances where the source text's pragmatic function was rendered differently.

- For the ST "Pardon me for breathing," Al-Nuaimi's TT, "سامحيني على ردي," translates the phrase as a direct apology for a harsh statement. Ezzeddine's TT, "اعذريني للحظة," renders it as a general request to be excused.
- For the ST "Oops-a-daisy," Ezzeddine's TT is "اسف جدا" (very sorry), translating the interjection as a formal apology. Al-Nuaimi's TT is "بئسا" (How wretched!), which renders the phrase as an expression of dismay.
- For the aggressive ST "All I want is forever to fuck off," Al-Nuaimi's TT is "كل ما أريد" (I just want everyone to leave me alone), which paraphrases the expletive into a statement of wanting solitude. Ezzeddine's TT is "كل ما أريد أن يغرب الجميع عن وجهي" (I want everyone to vanish from my sight), which retains a stronger sense of hostility.

#### 4.2 Translation of Idiomatic and Metaphorical Expressions

The translators employed distinct strategies for figurative language.

- For the idiom "I put my foot in it," Ezzeddine's TT is "هل اخرجتك؟" (Did I embarrass you?), focusing on the social consequence. Al-Nuaimi's TT is "هل افسدت الامر؟" (Did I ruin things?), which focuses on the negative outcome of an action.
- For the idiom "Chin-up," Ezzeddine used a literal translation, "ارفع راسك" (Raise your head). Al-Nuaimi used a cultural substitution, "ابتهج" (be joyful), replacing the English idiom with a common Arabic expression of encouragement.
- For the ST "She is cooking something up," Ezzeddine provided a literal translation, "انها تطبخ شيء ما" (She is cooking food). Al-Nuaimi provided a paraphrase, "انها تخطط لشيء ما" (She is planning something), which translates the figurative meaning of the idiom.
- For the metaphor "World is turning," Ezzeddine's TT is a literal translation, "الأرض تدور" (The Earth spins). Al-Nuaimi's TT is "لم يحدث أي شيء للعالم" (Nothing has changed in the world), which translates the implied meaning of stasis or confusion.
- For the idiom "They all end up eating sooner or later," Ezzeddine's TT is "كلهم حتما ستفشل" (They all end up leaving sooner or later), substituting the verb "eating" with "leaving." Al-Nuaimi's TT is "علاقتهمما" (Their relationship will inevitably fail), which interprets the phrase as a specific prediction about a relationship.

#### 4.3 Translation of Culture-Specific and Formal Language

Differences were also noted in the handling of culturally specific terms and levels of formality.

- For the ST "Her mother was the soberest woman I have ever met," Ezzeddine's TT is "أمها كانت أكثر امرأة رصينة قابلتها" (Her mother was the most dignified woman I've

met), using the word "رصينة" (dignified/composed). Al-Nuaimi's TT is "أمها كانت أكثر" (Her mother was the most balanced woman ever), using "متزنة" (balanced/stable).

· For the ST "Please make yourself comfortable," Ezzeddine's TT is a direct translation, "من فضلك خذ راحتك" (Please take your ease). Al-Nuaimi's TT is "حسنا" (Fine, the house is your house), which uses a common Arabic cultural expression of hospitality.

· For the ST "How much longer do you intend to hang around getting on everybody's tip," Ezzeddine's TT is "كم من الوقت تنوي التسكع هنا وإزعاج الجميع?" (How long do you intend to loiter here and bother everyone?), using the verb "تسكع" (to loiter). Al-Nuaimi's TT is "كم تنوي من الوقت ان تبقى تعتال على الجميع?" (How long do you intend to freeload on everybody?), using the verb "تعتال" (to freeload/take advantage of).

## Discussion

The discussion takes into consideration the results provided in the Results section and connects them to the theoretical framework of the study and answers the research questions. This analysis shows that the two translators have different strategic profiles, where Al-Nuaimi tends to be more inclined to domestication and is more oriented to functional equivalence, whilst Ezzeddine tends to be more of a more literal and foreignizing translator, though not necessarily. These patterns have implications on the theory and practice of translation as discussed below.

### 5.1 The Tension Between Functional Equivalence and Literal Accuracy

The results refer directly to Research Objective 3 by highlighting the persistent dilemma that translators have to deal with between meaning (functional equivalence) and the form of the original text (literal accuracy). The pragmatically charged utterances are especially insightful to analyze. In case of Forgive me breathing, a translation of Al-Nuaimi, "سامحيني على ردي القاسي" (Forgive me, breathing) is a misinterpretation of the ironic self-deprecating tones in the source text. He provides a literal analysis of the circumstance (an ungrateful reply was received) instead of its practical role (an apology through sarcasm). This is in line with Nida's (2001) warning that a strictly literal approach may not lead to the desired reaction of the target audience. By comparison, Ezzeddine neutralizes the irony of the situation in his "اعذريني للحظة" (Excuse me for a moment), whereby the author is fluent but loses the character of the same.

This trend is repeated in the pronouncement of the violent line. All I want is forever to fuck off. The paraphrasing by Al-Nuaimi, who says, "كل ما أريد هو أن يتركني الجميع" (sh Mah), is an obvious domestication. It gives precedence to an Arabic culturally acceptable form of frustration and, thereby, waters down the primitively visceral emotion of the original. The success of Ezzeddine in his "كل ما أريد أن يغرب الجميع عن وجهي" (I want everyone to go away and be out of my sight) is more effective in

maintaining the hostility, as it comes closer to the ideal concept of functional equivalence by Nida, since it does not lose the emotional touch. These examples show that functional equivalence is not a simple decision but the complicated process of negotiation in which the translator should make a decision between semantic meaning, emotional coloring, and cultural standards.

## 5.2 Navigating Cultural Dilemmas: Domestication vs. Foreignization

The decisions of the translators exemplify the domestication/foreignization dichotomy in a clear empirical manner, which deals directly with Research Objective 1. Al-Nuaimi has repeatedly shown an inclination towards domestication, modifying the references to the source culture so that they could be more universally acceptable to the target audience. The fact that he translates the phrase "chin up" as the Arabic word "chin up" (be joyful) could be considered a prime example of the cultural replacement of an English physical analogy with an Arabic verbal encouragement phrase. On the same note, his translation of "Please make yourself comfortable" to *حسنا البيت بيتك* (Fine, the house is your house) also draws upon the host-script of hospitality that is deeply rooted in Arab culture and thus plays to an instant connection with a viewer of Arab descent. This approach is consistent with the idea offered by Venuti on the fluent nature of the text and the invisibility, which places the values of the target culture first.

Ezzeddine, in his turn, tends to use a foreignizing approach. The physical metaphor of the source text is maintained in his literal translation of "chin-up" as "arfue ras ka" (raise your head). Although it does not take the original form, it may confuse viewers who are not conversant with the English phraseology, which is a significant issue of foreignization as observed in the literature. Nevertheless, Ezzeddine is not a regular foreigner. When he literally translates the meaning of "She is cooking something up" to mean *انها تطبخ شيئاً ما* (She is cooking food), this is not really a strategic decision but rather an inability to see the idiom, which leads to a mistranslation. It underscores the fact that a foreignizing strategy, when not done in a wise manner, may result in a failure to communicate, which proves the point that adaptation is an effective and required methodology in reducing cultural differences (Bastin, 2014).

The literalism tendency of Ezzeddine seen in the subtitles he provides, especially in such moments of his work as "She is cooking something up," could be explained in the framework of the modern subtitling processes. The transformation of the industry to cloud-based services places emphasis on the 'work efficiency and cost reduction' trend, which, as Oncins and Serrat-Roozen (2024) warn, usually undermines the quality of output. The decision made by the translator, though less functional pragmatically, may be due to time constraints or the nature of the translation tool, which may not enable extensive cultural adaptation.

### **5.3 The Challenge of Translating Idioms and Hidden Meanings**

The study of idiomatic expressions is a direct response to Research Objective 2, as it demonstrates why such aspects cannot be easily translated and the diverse ways in which translators can resolve them. The idiom "I put my foot in it?" discloses two paraphrasing strategies. Ezzeddine's "هل احرجتك؟" (Did I embarrass you?) aims at the social outcome, whereas Al-Nuaimi in his "هل افسدت الامر؟" (Did I ruin things?) is concerned with the overall bad thing. Both are good efforts to be functionally equivalent, but both miss the colloquial, self-satiric taste of the original.

The worst situation was the one that used to be "They all end up eating sooner or later." Both the translators failed to capture the metaphorical meaning of inevitable consequences. Al-Nuaimi has made an important interpretive jump in his translation, *حتما ستفشل علاقتهما* (Their relationship will inevitably fail), which has reduced the general metaphor to a limited romantic scenario. Ezzeddine's *يتركهم ينت* *bi al-magdaadira* *عاج* *liya am Ijaaliya* (they all end up taking away, being taken) is still a replacement of the basic metaphor of eating (consuming, being consumed) with the less complicated act of taking away. This is a good illustration of the fact that idioms are not only language problems but also thought problems, and an in-depth explanation of the conceptual metaphors of the culture of origin is required. It substantiates the fact that the purely linguistic mode of interpretation is not enough; translators need to refer to the subtext and film story context in order to come up with a decent solution.

### **5.4 Implications for Theory and Practice**

There are a number of implications of the findings of this study. Theoretically, they show that the domestication/foreignization dichotomy, though helpful, is more of a spectrum in the real world. Such translators as Al-Nuaimi and Ezzeddine alternate approaches depending on the case, implying that the arsenal of the proficient translator does not align with one ideological approach. In addition, the paper goes on to support the centrality of the Skopos theory; it appears that the decisions of the translators are informed by their implicit or explicit interpretations of the use of the translation. Al-Nuaimi seems focused on the Arab viewer as being able to perceive both the maximum fluency and emotional accessibility, whereas Ezzeddine appears focused on a more accurate translation of the original dialogue, at the expense of sometimes being clumsy.

To practice, the analysis provides practical information to translation trainers and subtitlers. The comparison of the data reveals that often, one cannot find a single correct answer but a set of options with various trade-offs. The inability to understand the translation of "She is cooking something up" correctly points to the urgent necessity of having the subtitlers with a high level of expertise in detecting idioms and pragmatic peculiarities. This substantiates the recommendation of the

study that translators need to be deeply involved with the audiovisual content, watching the movie to perceive tone, context, and the motivation of the characters and not merely work off the paper. It can also be concluded that during the training of subtitlers, certain modules on the cultural adaptation strategies and the pragmatic analysis of dialogue should also be included in the training program.

### **5.5 Limitations and Avenues for Future Research**

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it adopts a product-oriented approach, analyzing final subtitle outputs rather than the translators' cognitive processes or working conditions. As no access was available to translator interviews, briefs, or platform-specific guidelines, the study evaluates the functional, pragmatic, and cultural effects of the subtitles without attributing intentionality to the translators. Relatedly, extratextual constraints such as time pressure, character limits, or streaming platform style guides could not be examined, although these factors are known to influence audiovisual translation.

In addition, the study does not include audience reception data; therefore, assessments of functional equivalence and emotional impact are based on textual and theoretical analysis rather than empirically measured viewer responses. This delimitation is consistent with product-based research but limits claims about actual audience perception. The corpus is also restricted to fourteen selected utterances from a single film (*The Father*, 2020), allowing for in-depth qualitative analysis but limiting the generalizability of the findings across genres, platforms, or broader English–Arabic subtitling practices. Finally, while the analysis is grounded in established theoretical frameworks, the evaluation of pragmatic and cultural effects inevitably involves a degree of interpretive subjectivity. These limitations point to future research avenues, including process-oriented, reception-based, and larger corpus studies, to complement and extend the present findings.

### **Conclusion**

This paper aimed to perform the comparative analysis task of the cultural and linguistic adaptation strategies used in two official Arabic subtitle versions of the movie *The Father* (2020). The research determined that there are unique strategic profiles of the translators Mohammad Al-Nuaimi and Nizar Ezzeddine through a systematic case study. The results show that Al-Nuaimi always inclined to the domesticating approach, giving more attention to functional equivalence and cultural fluency for the target audience, which sometimes means sacrificing the particular idiomatic taste of the source text. By contrast, Ezzeddine was more inclined towards a more foreignizing, more literal approach, which did not alter the form of the original but occasionally led to awkwardness or lack of achievability of the intended pragmatic meaning. It was found that a negotiation of semantic accuracy degree,

emotional appeal, and technical limits of subtitling is necessary to translate irony, idioms, and culture-specific objects.

This is not simply a comparative analysis but a direct reference to the current problem of translator visibility in the digital world. According to Oncins and Serrat-Roozen (2024), one of the opportunities that new technologies have is to help take translators and content creators out of anonymity so that their work can be visible. The work will help achieve that purpose by going beyond the generic analysis on subtitles to the specific analysis on professional signatures of Mohammad Al-Nuaimi and Nizar Ezzeddine. The visibility of their strategic choices, by highlighting the creative and intellectual work involved in subtitling, helps drive home the point that translators are not invisible technicians and that they are instead writers of a secondary work who are also visible.

It is important to the research because it adds empirical, comparative information to a field where the theoretical discourse can be said to outperform applied analysis. This research fills the gap between translation theory and practice by logically evaluating the work of two professional translators on the same high-profile source text. It offers tangible data on navigation of such well-established concepts as domestication, foreignization, or functional equivalence in the context of audiovisual translation of streaming platforms used worldwide. A subtle, case-driven interpretation of the translator as a strategic agent whose decisions are made out of a sophisticated interaction of theoretical orientation, cultural sensitivity, and pragmatism is the main contribution of the study.

There are important research prospects that appear in this study, in addition to the valuable information that is provided. A good future area of development is in the context of reception studies, in which future studies may use audience-based techniques to determine the effect of various adaptation strategies on viewer understanding, emotional response, and total satisfaction empirically. This would put the consideration of the quality of translation not in a textual or an analytical paradigm, but in a more user-oriented paradigm based on real audience reactions.

Process-oriented research is another fruitful field that deserves further studies. In order to gain better insight into the factors behind the strategic decisions made by translators, future research may take on more ethnographic approaches, such as interviewing professional subtitlers alongside examining commissioning briefs, platform-specific instructions, or style guides provided by streaming platforms. This research question would assist in enlightening the institutional, economic, and logistical bottlenecks that influence subtitling practices in modern media settings.

Cross-genre and cross-linguistic comparative studies could be useful in future research as well. A broader set of comparative case studies might have been carried out in multiple language pairs with multiple types of films (comedy or action, etc.), and this would enable the researchers to verify how applicable the strategic patterns observed here in English-Arabic drama are to other forms of audiovisual settings.

Lastly, corpus-based analysis is also a worthwhile avenue of large-scale research. A large-scale creation and analysis of Arabic streaming site subtitles would allow seeing more general patterns in the technique of adaptation and getting a macro view of the current trends, conventions, and working practices in the subtitling profession. Through following these lines, scholars are able to form a more holistic picture of the art and craft of subtitling in the 21st century, which in the end helps to create better translations and provide a better cross-cultural media experience. Targeted education and best practices in industries should be put at the forefront by stakeholders to enhance subtitling performance. This involves creating professional cultural adaptation workshops, introducing core theories of audiovisual translation into the academic curriculum, and requiring subtitlers not only to work with the scripts but also the entire film context to enable the translation to be pragmatically and emotionally accurate.

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