

**EXPLORING TRANSLATION STRATEGIES OF
ARABIC SUBTITLES ON SEXUAL TABOOS IN
THE ENGLISH DRAMA SERIES
“SEX EDUCATION”**

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UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

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“SEX EDUCATION”**

by

SUHIB AHMAD SALEH ALNUSAIRAT

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AV	Audiovisual
AVT	Audiovisual Translation
ECR	Extralinguistic cultural references
SC	Source Culture
SL	Source Language
ST	Source Text
TC	Target Culture
TL	Target Language
TT	Target Text

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**MENELITI STRATEGI PENTERJEMAHAN SARI KATA TABU SEKSUAL
BAHASA ARAB DALAM SIRI DRAMA BAHASA INGGERIS
"SEX EDUCATION"**

ABSTRAK

Terjemahan audio-visual, terutamanya sari kata, telah menarik perhatian pelbagai cendekiawan. Walau bagaimanapun, terjemahan audio-visual sari kata bahasa Arab adalah jarang berlaku. Kajian deskriptif ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat terjemahan bahasa tabu seksual dalam sari kata bahasa Arab untuk menentukan bagaimana penterjemah sari kata menterjemah tabu seksual bahasa Inggeris ke dalam bahasa Arab. Kajian ini juga menilai sama ada ungkapan tabu seksual ini telah diperkuatkan, dikekalkan, atau diperkecilkan dalam sari kata bahasa Arab. Selain itu, kajian ini menganalisis bagaimana penterjemah sari kata menangani ungkapan seksual yang tidak mempunyai padanan dalam bahasa sasaran dan membina glosari untuk istilah tabu seksual untuk mencari padanan mereka dalam bahasa Arab. Kajian ini memberi tumpuan terutamanya kepada lapan kumpulan tabu seksual: onani, orgasme, seks oral, homoseksualiti, haid, pelacuran, organ genital, dan persetubuhan, yang berdasarkan kepada pengkategorian tabu seksual Allan dan Burrige (2006). Definisi strategi pemindahan di sini diambil dari gabungan karya Díaz-Cintas dan Remael (2007), Pedersen (2011), dan Flotow (1997). Teori Skopos (1984), teori polysystem (1978/2000), dan teori manipulasi (1985) digunakan untuk membentuk kerangka teori kajian ini. Santaemilia (2008) menekankan keperluan untuk menyelidik terjemahan bahasa berkaitan seks kerana ia merupakan isu sensitif dan istimewa di mana penyelidik mungkin berhadapan dengan had budaya, moral, dan etika serta mencari keseimbangan antara menyampaikan makna sumber dan mengekalkan budaya dan

ideologi. Dua musim siri British Sex Education membentuk korpus kajian ini. Ungkapan tabu seksual telah diekstrak dan diklasifikasikan mengikut taksonomi Allan dan Burridge (2006). Penyelidik kemudian mengkaji strategi yang digunakan dalam sari kata bahasa Arab berdasarkan Díaz-Cintas dan Remael (2007), Pedersen (2011), dan Flotow (1997). Kajian ini juga menganalisis sama ada versi bahasa Arab bagi ungkapan tabu seksual dikekalkan, diperkuatkan, atau diperkecilkan dengan mengambil kira identiti gender. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa sari kata bahasa Arab cenderung menterjemah mengikut bahasa sumber daripada bahasa sasaran. Analisis menunjukkan bagaimana penterjemah sari kata cenderung menggunakan strategi terjemahan yang berorientasikan sumber berbanding strategi terjemahan yang berorientasikan sasaran, yang bermaksud ungkapan tabu seksual cenderung diperkuatkan apabila diterjemah ke dalam bahasa Arab. Analisis juga menunjukkan bahawa beberapa ungkapan tabu seksual tidak mempunyai padanan dalam bahasa Arab. Oleh itu, penyelidik mencadangkan bahawa pencapaian padanan dalam bahasa sasaran mungkin sangat bergantung pada teori Skopos. Selain itu, kajian ini menekankan keperluan untuk strategi terjemahan yang berkesan untuk menangani ungkapan yang kekurangan padanan langsung, memberikan panduan kepada penterjemah sari kata yang mengendalikan kandungan sensitif. Selain itu, penyelidikan ini menyumbang kepada pemahaman tentang bagaimana keputusan terjemahan mempengaruhi penerimaan dan pemahaman penonton, menawarkan pandangan tentang bagaimana amalan terjemahan dapat mempengaruhi keberkesanan dan aksesibiliti kandungan yang disarikan.

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ABSTRACT

Audio-visual translation, particularly subtitling, has drawn the attention of various scholars. However, the audiovisual translation of Arabic subtitles is rare. This descriptive study aims to investigate the translation of sexual taboo language in Arabic subtitles to determine how subtitlers translate English sexual taboos into Arabic. The present study also assesses whether these taboo sexual expressions have been reinforced, maintained, or downplayed in the Arabic subtitles. Additionally, the study analyzes how subtitlers deal with sexual expressions that do not have equivalents in the target language and builds a glossary for the sexual taboo terms to find their equivalents in Arabic. This study focuses primarily on eight groups of sexual taboos: masturbation, orgasms, oral sex, homosexuality, menstruation, prostitution, genital organs, and copulation, which are based on Allan and Burridge's (2006) categorization of sexual taboos. The definition of transferring strategies here was adopted from a combination of the works of Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007), Pedersen (2011), and Flotow (1997). The Skopos theory (1984), polysystem theory (1978/2000), and manipulation theory (1985) were used to form the theoretical framework of the study. Santaemilia (2008) underlines the need to research the translation of sex-related language because it is a sensitive and privileged issue where researchers may confront cultural, moral, and ethical limitations and also find a balance between conveying the source meaning and preserving culture and ideology. Two seasons of the British series *Sex Education* form the corpus of the study. The sexual taboo expressions have

been extracted and classified according to the taxonomy of Allan and Burridge (2006). The researcher then studies the strategies used in the Arabic subtitles based on Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007), Pedersen (2011), and Flotow (1997). The study also analyzes whether the Arabic versions of sexual taboo expressions are maintained, reinforced, or downplayed considering gender identity. The findings show that Arabic subtitles tend to translate according to the source language rather than the target language. The analysis illustrates how subtitlers tend to use source-oriented translation strategies more than target-oriented translation strategies, meaning the sexual taboo expressions tend to be reinforced when subtitled into Arabic. The analysis also shows that some sexual taboo expressions do not have any equivalents in the Arabic language. Thus, the researcher suggests that achieving target language equivalence may rely heavily on the Skopos theory. Additionally, the study highlights the need for effective translation strategies to handle expressions that lack direct equivalents, providing guidance for subtitlers dealing with sensitive content. Furthermore, the research contributes to the understanding of how translation decisions impact audience reception and comprehension, offering insights into how translation practices can influence the effectiveness and accessibility of subtitled content.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Translation studies were considered merely a branch of linguistics until Holmes (1988) published his seminal paper, "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies," in 1972. Holmes's (1988) work marked a milestone in establishing translation studies as a distinct academic field. Since then, scholars from various disciplines have explored multiple facets of translation. For example, Baker (1992), Munday (2008), and Díaz Cintas (2009) investigated diverse concepts within translation studies and proposed different translation strategies. Recent research has focused on translating allusions (Leppihalme, 1994), idioms (Carter, 2000), metaphors (Newmark, 1988), wordplay (Delabastita, 1996), and extralinguistic cultural references (Nedergaard Larsen, 1993; Pedersen, 2007; Chiaro, 2009). Among the various areas in translation studies, audiovisual translation (AVT) has garnered particular attention over the past two decades due to the rapid growth of the film industry (Díaz Cintas, 2009: 3).

The increasing globalization of media and entertainment has brought cultures into closer contact than ever before, highlighting the importance of effective cross-cultural communication (Aririguzoh, 2022). Furthermore, recent technology developments have led to the mass distribution of audiovisual products in the world and more specifically in the Arab world (Castellón, 2021). As a result, audiovisual translation has been continuously in demand, and Arab scholars are becoming more interested in the field. Many studies have been conducted on audiovisual translation in such as those of Mijrib (2020), Gamal (2020), Thawbteh (2017), Dweik (2022) Jamal

(2008) to name a few. However, the number of these studies is not adequate with respect to the importance of audiovisual translation and its significant impact on Arabic society.

Among the myriad challenges in this arena is the translation of sensitive and significant content, such as sexually explicit idioms, between languages with distinct cultural and social norms. Taboo translation in audiovisual texts appears to be a problematic area in the realm of translation Albarakati (2024). The transference of taboo expressions across languages presents a significant challenge for translators (Almijrab, 2020), as these expressions often carry deeply ingrained cultural, social, and moral connotations that can be difficult to convey accurately in another language. Arab scholars have extensively studied this issue in the context of audiovisual texts, particularly focusing on dubbed and subtitled films. Notable contributions include the works of Mijrib (2020) and Thawabteh (2017), which have explored various strategies for translating taboo language and the complexities involved. Despite these efforts, numerous unresolved issues remain, such as the impact of translation choices on audience perception, the effectiveness of different translation strategies, and the adequacy of existing frameworks in addressing the nuances of taboo language. These gaps highlight the need for further research to develop more comprehensive approaches to the translation of taboo expressions, ensuring that subtitling practices can more effectively handle the intricacies of culturally sensitive content.

Sexually explicit language often carries significant cultural weight and sensitivity. In English-speaking societies, certain idioms related to sexuality are regarded as taboo, reflecting broader social norms about modesty, propriety, and decency (Elliott, 2023). These norms are shaped by historical, religious, and cultural factors that influence public discourse and media representation (Elliott, 2023). For

instance, explicit discussions of sexual matters might be restricted in formal settings and media to adhere to established norms of civility and respect. Such taboos often stem from a desire to maintain social decorum and avoid offending public sensibilities (Elliott, 2023).

Conversely, Arabic-speaking cultures possess their own distinct set of norms and taboos regarding sexual content, deeply rooted in religious and cultural values (Al Mosawi, 2023). Islamic teachings, along with traditional cultural practices, place a high value on modesty and discretion, which impacts how sexual language is perceived and discussed (Elliott, 2023). This can result in a different set of sensitivities and restrictions when translating sexual content into Arabic. For instance, certain expressions or topics that might be more openly discussed in English media may require significant adaptation or omission in Arabic translations to align with cultural expectations and religious principles.

At the inception of this thesis, the researcher seeks to elucidate specific personal interests and motivations underpinning this endeavor, serving as catalysts for the pursuit of doctoral research. This endeavor is undertaken with the primary objective of disseminating these motivations and interests to academic peers and readers with aligned interests in the thematic domain of this research.

Firstly, a multitude of films and audiovisual products from various countries and languages have been imported into the Arab world in recent years (Gamal, 2020), giving viewers the chance to learn about and enjoy the unique aspects of other cultures. The captivating and intriguing stories presented in these programs significantly contribute to their success and attract a vast number of Arab viewers. Naturally, these foreign-language productions need to be translated into Arabic. Considering the

novelty of these programs on Arab screens and their wide reach, the researcher has a strong personal interest in the field of language transfer activities on screen. The goal is to understand the role translation plays in either preserving or ideologically altering certain elements of the storyline.

Secondly, the researcher is driven by the interest of finding potential answers to questions regarding the linguistic differences that can be found between men's and women's ways of speaking, particularly in terms of the type of language that they use and the existence of some conventional and prejudiced ideas upon women. The comparison of two societies as different as the west and the Arab is expected to yield thought-provoking results that can shed light in the way in which the clash of civilizations gets resolved on screen. It is anticipated that such a journey will provide the researcher with a unique chance to gain a deeper insight into the areas concerning ideological manipulation on screen and some of the feminist ideas regarding women and translation.

This study employs the Skopos Theory (Reiss & Vermeer, 1984) as a key theoretical framework. Skopos Theory emphasizes the purpose (skopos) of a translation and the functional aspect of translation decisions, suggesting that translations should be tailored to fit the target audience's cultural and contextual expectations. By applying Skopos Theory, this research explores how the purpose of the translation influences the handling of sexually explicit idioms in Arabic subtitles. The theory helps to understand how translators navigate the cultural and ideological boundaries of both source and target languages, aiming to produce translations that meet the communicative goals of the target audience while maintaining the integrity of the source content.

In other words, this study aims to explore translation strategies of Arabic subtitles on sexual taboo expressions in the English drama series “Sex Education” based on the classification of Allan and Burridge (2006) of sexual taboo. This chapter offers a comprehensive introduction to the field of audio-visual translation with a specific focus on the ramifications of subtitling taboo sexual language. The problem statement, significance, objective of the study, and research questions are comprehensively outlined. The present chapter encompasses the elucidation of key terms.

1.2 Background of the Study

Language is a fundamental medium of communication, deeply embedded in daily interactions and essential for human connection (Pickering, 2022). It plays a pivotal role in enabling individuals to convey thoughts, emotions, and intentions. In various contexts, people may choose to employ language that evokes a strong emotional response to reflect their mood or to underscore their feelings—whether they are experiencing happiness, sadness, or anger (Pickering, 2022; Sri et al., 2021).

For instance, individuals often resort to language that carries significant emotional weight, which can sometimes include terms deemed inappropriate or offensive (Motala, 2021). This use of impactful language, while effective in conveying intense feelings, raises important questions about appropriateness and the boundaries of acceptable communication. Such language can be particularly problematic when it crosses into realms of bad language or obscenities, which, while potentially powerful, may be viewed as socially unacceptable or disrespectful.

Understanding why people choose certain types of language and the implications of these choices involves examining the interplay between linguistic expression. It also requires a critical analysis of how language can both construct and deconstruct societal values, and how its use reflects and influences interpersonal dynamics.

One of the ways to express their feelings or describe something is by saying taboo words. Taboo is a cultural or religious custom that does not allow people to do, use, or talk about a particular thing as people find it offensive or embarrassing (Saputri, 2023). Taboo words are words that many people consider offensive or shocking, for example, because they refer to sex, the body or people's race (Saputri, 2023). Taboo word becomes a phenomenon in today's life, it occurs in most languages because every member of society has different ways to express their mind in language. The existence of taboo words can be found from various sources such in movies, song lyrics, social media, and television shows or television series (Lubis et al., 2020). Taboo word is a part of informal language and exists in most of our society. The term taboo was borrowed from Tongan, a Polynesian language means forbidden.

Wardhaugh (2014: p.229) mentions that taboo is related to the culture meanings, which are expressed in language. It means that language is used to avoid saying certain thing which is considered immoral and improper to the certain thing.

The advent of talkie movies posed a significant challenge for the film industry since not all audiences understood the original language of the films. Diaz Cintas and Remael (2007: p.8) noted that "*a common companion of the image since the 1930s has been the word, and with the word comes the need for translation.*" The high demand

for international marketing in the film industry led to the development of two principal methods of audiovisual translation: dubbing and subtitling (Sadeghpour, 2018).

Today, audiovisual products have become an integral part of everyday life, with fans eagerly anticipating new episodes and seasons (Benson-Allott, 2021). Expressions from movies are commonly used in daily conversations, and various forms of media are accessible through TVs, satellite programs, and platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Apple TV, and Shahed. The shift from analogue to digital technology has enabled the film industry to produce a wide range of AV products, including animations, movies, documentaries, sitcoms, and soap operas.

Consequently, the demand for the translation of audiovisual (AV) products has historically surpassed that of other translation forms. As Díaz-Cintas (2004: p.50) observed, "due to the number of people they reach and the large number of translated products distributed worldwide," audiovisual translation (AVT) is indeed one of the most pervasive forms of translation today. This widespread influence highlights AVT as a crucial component in global communication, given its role in bridging diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. However, Díaz-Cintas (2004) pointed out that, considering the significance of audiovisual texts in our lives, the number of studies done have been few:

A paradox highlights the surprising imbalance between the limited research on audiovisual translation and its substantial impact on society. Quantitatively, audiovisual translation is the most significant translational activity of our era. This is due to its wide reach, primarily through television, the vast array of translated products that transcend cultural boundaries—such as documentaries, films, news, debates,

concerts, and television series—and the immediacy of its reception through mediums like television, cinema, and DVD (Jorge Diaz Cintas, 2004: p.50).

However, despite its prominence, Díaz-Cintas (2004) noted a significant gap in the scholarly exploration of AVT. Although audiovisual texts play an increasingly vital role in shaping our understanding of different cultures and in facilitating cross-cultural communication, the academic attention devoted to this field remains disproportionately limited (Masoud, 2023; Gamal, 2020). This discrepancy highlights a critical oversight in translation studies: the need for a more comprehensive and nuanced examination of AVT practices.

The scarcity of in-depth research in AVT is particularly striking when considering its extensive impact on global media consumption and cultural exchange. Given the volume of AV content produced and translated, one might expect a more robust body of academic work that addresses the complexities and challenges inherent in AV translation. This gap in research calls for a more rigorous and systematic approach to studying AVT, to better understand its implications and to enhance the quality and effectiveness of translation practices in this increasingly significant field.

Audiovisual translation has some differences with conventional methods of translation such as literary translation. The differences arise from the nature of the audiovisual texts. They are consumed as polysemiotic text (Gottlieb, 1998: p.245) that consist of four channels of communication in the transference of the messages. Delabastita (1989: 199) presents the channels in the audiovisual texts as follows:

- 1) Visual channel – verbal signs: e.g. credits, letters shown on screen.
- 2) Visual channel – non-verbal signs: e.g. gestures, costumes, make-up.
- 3) Acoustic channel – verbal signs: e.g. dialogue.

- 4) Acoustic channel – non-verbal signs: e.g. background music, sound effects.

Comprehension of the audiovisual texts may also be a challenging task for some viewers. Although the presentation of the information via visual and oral channels could help viewers better understand a movie, different accents, jargon and other sounds in the movies may intervene to prevent full comprehension of the message (Louaifi, 2020). Diaz Cintas (2009: p.4) mentioned that “even for those with an adequate command of the foreign language, audiovisual productions bring with them a whole range of obstacles”

He then went on with the reasons and argued that “they may hamper comprehension of a given scene due to the fast-paced dialogue exchanges among characters, the use of unknown dialectal and sociolectal variations, instances of overlapping speech and interfering diegetic noises and music”(Diaz Cintas, 2009: p.4). Considering the variety of audiovisual products and the great consumption of them in the world on the one hand and the difficulty of understanding those products, on the other hand, can play an important role in audiovisual translation helping to bridge the gap.

Translation has always facilitated cultural exchange between languages and cultures. Trivedi (2007: p.280) asserted that language is simply “a vehicle of the culture.” Therefore, translation encompasses not just the transfer of meaning between languages but also an exchange of cultural elements. Throughout history, translation has impacted every society. However, cultural exchange is particularly pronounced in audiovisual translation compared to other forms. Moreover, audiovisual texts exert a greater influence on societies than other types of translation.

Individuals absorb elements of other cultures subconsciously when watching foreign films. With the dominance of the Western film industry globally, many aspects of Western culture infiltrate other societies through audiovisual translation. This dominance also poses a significant challenge to the film industries of other countries. According to Gottlieb (2009: p.21), "onscreen, English is the all-dominant foreign language and threatens the film industry of other countries; unlike all others, they do not enjoy foreign-language productions, whether dubbed or subtitled." The incorporation of English words and expressions into other languages, such as "chat," "message," "miss you," and "honey," as well as cultural practices like Valentine's Day and Halloween, exemplifies the one-way cultural exchange from American culture to others via audiovisual translation. The infusion of foreign cultural elements, particularly Western ones, into Arab society is viewed by some as a threat to Islamic-Arabic culture. Many foreign cultural elements contradict Islamic-Arabic values and beliefs and negatively influence the younger generation in the Arab world. For example, casual relationships between boys and girls and cohabitation of unmarried couples are seen as detrimental impacts of Western culture on Arab society.

Muñoz-Calvo (2010: p.2) argued that "translators need cultural literacy, communicative language competence, and cross-cultural competence as well because they have to interpret sociocultural meaning in cross-cultural encounters." Translators require not only general translation skills such as linguistic competence but also a deep understanding of both source and target cultures to identify equivalent cultural elements in the target texts. Considering the various aspects of translation, Bassnett (2011: p.96) noted that "the translator is engaged not only with the words, but with the context in which those words appear, and any equivalent will have to take into account the two different contexts, that of the source and that of the target." The context of

dialogues is crucial in audiovisual translation. Translators must align their work with the oral and visual context of the films, as failing to recreate the movie's context in the target text would hinder the message's transfer.

One of the most challenging areas in translation is the transfer of taboo across languages and cultures. The relevance and presence of taboo as a key communicative element in film has recently led to an upsurge of studies within AVT (e.g., Alsharhan 2020; Ávila Cabrera, 2014, 2023; Briechele & Eppler 2019; Valdeón 2020; Xavier 2021, 2022, 2024; Formentelli & Ghia 2021; Pavesi & Zamora 2022). The current trend is watching movies and series through Netflix and other broadcasting platforms.

The interaction between technology, language and culture is also increasing (Yuan, 2020). The progress in digital technology has led to the transformation of audio-visual products into the primary medium for conveying messages and disseminating culture across different countries, especially in cases where the languages and cultures of these countries are dissimilar (ibid). This is particularly true in the case of the West and the Arab world as the frequency of communication between the two cultures is at an all-time high. Moreover, the scholarly development of the field of translation studies (TS) and audio-visual translation (AVT) has proven to be advantageous in advancing audio-visual communications and enhancing their recognition as legitimate subjects of inquiry.

This study aims to enhance cross-cultural communication between Western societies and Arabic-speaking countries in the Middle East by examining the Arabic translations of sexually explicit idioms that are considered taboo in the English language. By throwing light on these translations, it is anticipated that this research will contribute to an improved understanding and dialogue between both regions. The

cultural turn in the field of translation places considerable importance on socio-cultural value. This turn not only expands the scope of translation studies by include peripheral forms of translation, such as audio-visual translation, but also enhances the field through interdisciplinary study. AVT has reached an important level with the introduction of digital technology: AV programs have become a key cultural medium for conveying expressions not only through real data but also preconceptions, attitudes, moral concepts and taboos, which are shared internationally (Luyken et al., 1991).

Gambier (2018) stated that the field of translation studies has encountered cultural studies, leading to a rejection of the idea that translation is solely a linguistic endeavour. Instead, translation is now perceived as a form of intercultural engagement. Additionally, he emphasised that the process of translating culturally cantered films for a particular cultural and linguistic audience necessitates a comprehensive comprehension of the disparities in terminology and imagery employed by the originating culture. The portrayal of interaction with others in films is subordinate to the dynamic between the source language or culture and the target language or culture. In addition, the utilisation of subtitling as an audio-visual modality has been recognised as an important method for enhancing audience communication, particularly when contrasted to the prevalent alternative of dubbing (Zhang et al., 2009).

In contrast to traditional methods to translation, subtitling is a linguistic process that involves the conversion of spoken language into written form. It heavily relies on specialised equipment to effectively convey information and expertise to the audience. The act of subtitling can be understood as a means of interaction and a cultural phenomenon wherein various social practises converge to facilitate oral and written communication that represents the concept of 'the other'. This representation is

influenced by the presence of taboo words, which are intricately linked to particular traditions and communities, and are employed in distinct ways within specific social and religious contexts. This implies that the appropriate translation for these terms varies based on the specific context and the manner in which they are interpreted (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007: p.199). Considering that taboo sexual language includes information about the characters and situations and add to the audience's understanding of what is going on in a specific part of a debate, deleting taboo words entails 'a reduction of communicative impact and social implications' (Greenall, 2011), as well as the suppression of the 'other', which means the men or women who do not understand the standard speech (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2007).

In subtitling, verbal and non-verbal information is converted from audio-visual products into text on the screen, which is affected by spatio-temporal limitations. Many academics have focused on the prevalence of audio-visual translated products. Additionally, several researchers have begun exploring the various challenges in the translation process and the effects of AVT on target communities. Most language pairs are comparatively similar in these studies considering that studies on Arabic subtitles are lacking and that the differences between two language and cultures.

Moreover, Islamic and Western communities do not share the same set of values. Culturally loaded as it is, offensive language in the TL culture has been censored (Thawabteh, 2017). The core issue is how English sitcom taboos are handled by Arabic subtitlers. The intriguing topics of sexuality, gender and identity motivated this study endeavour. Sex-related language is often considered a significant tool in the construction and regulation of sexual ideology. Consequently, such language undergoes careful examination and analysis (Santaemilia 2005: p.3). Furthermore,

people' sexual desires, attitudes, and actions are shaped by the classifications produced through the utilisation of sexual terminology (Cameron and Kulick 2003: p.19).

The purpose of this study is to analyse the subtitling of sex-related language from English to Arabic in an effort to disentangle the interrelationships that may form between these numerous topic areas and to compare the diverse perspectives on sex and sexuality that are held by the Arab world and English-speaking nations. In this respect, House (2009) sees culture as a connected series of beliefs and values that are shared through each speech community.

Language and culture are intrinsically intertwined, with culture often viewed as a manifestation of language (Silverstein, 2022). Consequently, translation involves more than just transferring words from one language to another; it encompasses the transmission of cultural differences and societal values between different communities (Plyth & Crahan, 2023). However, this process is inherently complex because culture represents the totality of a society's lifestyle and experiences. It is a multifaceted construct shaped by historical, social, and contextual factors.

One of the key challenges in translation is effectively conveying cultural elements that are deeply embedded in language. This complexity is particularly evident when translating taboo sexual language, which carries significant social and cultural connotations (Rędzioch-Korkuz, 2021). This study aims to evaluate how the identity and social positions of Arabs, especially women, are represented through taboo sexual language in the English language and how this representation is handled in the Arabic subtitles. By analyzing these translations, the research seeks to understand how well the subtitling retains the original communicative impact and social implications of the source material.

As Greenall (2011) emphasizes, maintaining the authenticity of the target text's communicative impact is crucial for preserving the integrity of the source material's social and cultural significance. The study will assess whether the depiction of taboo sexual language in Arabic subtitles successfully reflects the original context while navigating the cultural sensitivities of the target audience. This analysis aims to reveal the challenges and strategies involved in translating culturally charged content and to contribute to a deeper understanding of how translation practices influence cross-cultural communication and representation.

The researcher chose to use *Sex Education* as the corpus for this research because of its immense popularity and the intricacy of its language and concepts, which represent a significant challenge for subtitlers, especially when dealing with two incongruous languages and cultures like Arabic and English. Thus, the purpose of this descriptive study is to investigate the management of taboo sexual words at the intersection of two diverse languages and cultures through subtitling.

1.3 Problem Statement

The global market for audiovisual translation (AVT) has experienced significant growth due to advancements in technology and the ongoing trend of globalization (Sadeghpour, 2018). However, translators face considerable challenges in overcoming linguistic and cultural obstacles when transferring content between languages, particularly when dealing with taboo terms embedded in distinct cultural contexts (Dweik, 2022). This difficulty is compounded by the need to balance the faithful conveyance of the source meaning with the preservation of cultural and ideological values in the target language.

Translators often grapple with the challenge of maintaining this balance, especially when the source language contains taboo terms that are sensitive or controversial in the target culture. For instance, Arabic culture, with its religious orientation, may impose stricter norms and censorship on the use of taboo language compared to more liberal Western cultures (Mijrib, 2020). This divergence reflects broader cultural realities; Islamic and Western societies interpret and handle offensive language differently, leading to varying degrees of censorship and cultural sensitivity.

In this context, censorship is not merely about restricting offensive language but also about reinforcing cultural norms and maintaining a sense of cultural superiority and immunity within the target audience. Mijrib (2020) further emphasizes that religion plays a critical role in shaping how taboo words and expressions are rendered, influencing both the translation strategies employed and the reception of such content in the target culture.

This study focuses on the translation of sex-related taboo language from English into Arabic by analyzing the British series *Sex Education*. It examines the factors influencing translators' decision-making processes and how these decisions affect the representation of culturally sensitive content. By exploring these dynamics, the research sheds light on the complexities of translating taboo language across cultures and the strategies employed to navigate these challenges, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the interplay between language and translation practices.

The first issue arises in subtitling the British series *Sex Education* is the immense number of taboo sexual expressions that are used to convey innermost emotions such as anger, pleasure, sadness and irony by the protagonists (both male

and female) in the series (Jay, 2009). Jay (2009) highlights the substantial challenges associated with translating sexual taboo expressions into culturally sensitive contexts, such as Arabic. The difficulty lies in preserving the essence and impact of the original expressions while adhering to the cultural norms and sensitivities of the target audience. This issue is further corroborated by Mijrib (2020), who underscores the complexities involved in rendering taboo language within the constraints of a culture that emphasizes modesty and religious values. Both scholars agree that translating such sensitive content requires careful consideration to balance fidelity to the source material with respect for the cultural and ideological norms of the target culture.

To illustrate the extent of these challenges, consider the examples from the series *Sex Education*, which vividly demonstrate the use of taboo sexual expressions to convey the protagonists' innermost emotions. In one instance, Adam's friend uses a vulgar epithet to generalize about fathers' behavior, expressing frustration with his own father. The original dialogue employs the term 'pussy,' which carries explicit sexual connotations. However, the Arabic subtitles translate this term as مغفل [stupid], a euphemistic phrase commonly used to refer to female genitalia. This substitution eliminates the explicit sexual meaning and reflects a restrained approach towards the use of explicit language, aligning with the cultural norms of Arabic-speaking audiences.

This modification in the Arabic subtitles illustrates the extensive challenge translators face when dealing with taboo sexual expressions. Such substitutions are not merely linguistic choices but strategic decisions to navigate cultural sensitivities and maintain social acceptability. By altering the original text, translators aim to influence Arab viewers' perceptions of sensitive topics, including the connection between the female body and prevailing biases. This example underscores the immense number of

taboo sexual expressions used in the series to express deep emotions, and the nuanced strategies required to handle these expressions in different cultural contexts.

Also, Lubis et al. (2020) stated the same idea “One of the ways to express people’s feelings or describe something is by saying taboo words. Taboo is a cultural or religious custom that does not allow people to do, use, or talk about a particular thing as people find it offensive or embarrassing, taboo words are words that many people consider offensive or shocking, for example, because they refer to sex, the body or people’s race”. In the same vein, another issue that comes to the fore is the lack of certain sexual terms in Arabic language – for example the words of ‘homosexuality’. Although such words do exist in Arabic sexual jargon and terminology, the cultural norms of such phenomena are considered taboo in the target text.

The dearth of scholarly literature on sexual taboo language from an Arabic standpoint may impose constraints on the extent of analysis of Arabic perspectives on sexually taboo words. Consequently, such perspectives may be inadequately translated, inaccurately translated, or disregarded entirely throughout the subtitling translation process. Therefore, the researcher attempts to determine the strategies that are frequently used by subtitlers in light of the previously mentioned issues. Thus, these sexually taboo words in *Sex Education* reduces the impact of the translated version of the program in the Arabic language from the viewpoint of conveying emotions, meaning or even accurate information on sex education content. Translators should aim to minimise the omission of taboo language and accurately transmit utterances within the appropriate context in order to prevent translation errors. It is important for translators to strive for a presentation of the target text that closely aligns with the perspective of the source text.

The British series *Sex Education* acknowledges that sex is about more than the physical act, and it accounts for how intersectionality affects people's sex lives. First, it focuses on varied personalities. Second, diversity infuses the show's storylines, not simply its actors. Given that the show's main protagonist is a heterosexual, cisgender young man, this sends a message to the show's young viewers that they must be mindful of their sex and other advantages. Given that sex has traditionally been controlled in the media, particularly media oriented toward young people, it is nice to see sex handled honestly, freely and in a witty and enjoyable manner. *Sex Education* recognises that sex is as multifaceted as a person's identity and encourages its audience to see others as more than a classmate, friend or family member. However, according to Jackson et al. (2019), the series is considered as 'Netflix's *Sex Education* is the feminist show young viewers need', which indicates that both male and female protagonists use taboo sexual expressions. Santaemilia (2005: p.13) pointed out that using sex-related language has traditionally been as men's privilege.

This assertion presents a contradiction to the cultural norms of Arabic culture, which are predominantly influenced by the Islamic religion and notions of masculinity. Consequently, there is a valid rationale for undertaking research on the translation of language pertaining to sexuality, as it represents a domain that is both privileged and delicate. Within this realm, scholars may encounter disparities in cultural perspectives and confront moral and ethical boundaries. Santaemilia (2005) argued that the act of translation involves a constant struggle to find a middle ground between personal ethical considerations and the various constraints imposed by society. This struggle becomes particularly apparent when it comes to the task of rephrasing language that pertains to sexual matters. Regarding this issue, the translator focuses on whether taboo

sexual language is maintained, reinforced or downplayed in its translation regarding ideology.

Although Santaemilia (2005: p.3) highlighted the tension that translators face when dealing with this type of language, he mentioned that the act of translating language connected to sex has the potential to highlight the ethical standards held by the translator. He also contended that sex-related language is viewed as a tool of constructing and constraining people's sexual ideologies. Furthermore, Santaemilia's study leads to other important issues that are linked to gender. According to Flotow (1997: p.5), feminists coined the word 'gender' to emphasise and comprehend the social differences between men and women; taking gender aspects into consideration might be as an extra load on translators, particularly when transferring a text from English to Arabic due to the sensitivity of the Arab community towards women, as well as the traditional view of women as being more conservative and private than men.

In *Sex Education*, the interplay between culture and translation, which is also known as the 'cultural turn' (Bassnet & Lefever, 1998), has not only embedded inaccurate and misleading messages but also imposed assumptions, moral ideas, stereotypes and taboo concepts on different cultures such as talking about terms relating with homosexuality or incest.

Despite the significant growth in the audiovisual translation (AVT) market, there is a notable gap in the research on translating sexually explicit language, particularly taboo expressions, between English and Arabic. Although extensive scholarly work exists on AVT, detailed studies focusing specifically on the translation of sensitive sexual content are limited. Jay (2009) and Mijrib (2020) provide insight

into the general challenges translators face, but there is a lack of in-depth analysis on the specific strategies used to address these challenges. Existing research does not fully explore how translators handle the absence of direct equivalents for taboo terms in Arabic or how these decisions impact the accuracy and effectiveness of the translation. For instance, studies like those by Dweik (2022) and Sadeghpour (2018) discuss broader translation issues but do not address the nuanced difficulties of translating sexual taboos. Additionally, the impact of such translations on the audience's understanding of sex education content remains underexplored. This gap highlights the need for targeted research into the methodologies employed in translating sexually explicit language to better understand how these strategies influence both the conveyance of content and its reception by the target audience. Addressing this gap is crucial for improving the quality and sensitivity of translations in the rapidly expanding field of AVT.

It is, therefore, crucial to provide an in-depth investigation of the translation transfer for these sexually taboo expressions and to overcome linguistic and cultural obstacles between different languages and cultures. Therefore, the research focuses on analysing the various strategies and technique transfers that the translators activated when dealing with sexually taboo language in English and Arabic. In shedding light on translating sexually taboo language regarding the present lexical and cultural gap that exists between the source and target languages, the research also considers the spatio-temporal constraints in AVT by emphasising how cultural information (sex-related language) is transferred through AV products. In other words, the research determines how AV products navigate cultural variations among different countries when it comes to subtitling and its characteristics and limitations, in addition to the issues that affect the TT message's delivery to the TT audience.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of this study:

- 1.4.1 To determine the strategies used by subtitlers in translating taboo sexual expressions from English into Arabic
- 1.4.2 To assess whether the taboo sexual expressions have been reinforced, maintained, or downplayed in the Arabic subtitles.
- 1.4.3 To develop a sexual taboo glossary for terminologies that have not found equivalence from English into Arabic.

1.5 Research Questions

In conducting this research, the researcher has sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1.5.1 What strategies did the translators use to translate taboo sexual expressions from English into Arabic for the selected series?
- 1.5.2 Were the taboo sexual expressions maintained, reinforced or downplayed in the Arabic subtitles?
- 1.5.3 What are the equivalent Arabic sexual taboo terminologies suggested to match the English sexual taboo terms for the Sex Education series?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study offers a valuable contribution by addressing the complexities of translating taboo sexual language from English to Arabic, bridging a significant gap between these two culturally distinct languages. By focusing on the British television series Sex Education, the research provides an in-depth examination of subtitling

practices and highlights the intricacies involved in translating sensitive content. This not only enriches the field of translation studies but also enhances our understanding of how sexual taboos are navigated in subtitling.

The research is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it adds to the growing body of knowledge on audiovisual translation (AVT) by detailing the subtitling strategies used for taboo sexual expressions. This contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how subtitlers handle culturally sensitive topics, revealing whether such expressions are reinforced, maintained, or downplayed in the Arabic subtitles. The study's findings are particularly relevant in illustrating how translation practices can reflect and affect cultural norms and perceptions.

Furthermore, this study underscores the importance of considering cultural contexts in translation. It demonstrates that translating language related to sexuality involves more than mere linguistic conversion; it requires a deep understanding of cultural and ideological factors. The comparison between Arab and Western perspectives on sexual taboos sheds light on how cultural values influence translation decisions. This insight is valuable for both scholars and practitioners, as it highlights the need for sensitivity to cultural differences in subtitling practices.

The research also has broader implications for the field of translation and cultural studies. By exploring the interplay between language, culture, and ideology, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how translation can impact cultural perceptions and audience reception. This is particularly significant in an era where global media and entertainment increasingly cross-cultural boundaries.

Additionally, the study provides practical guidance for translators and subtitlers working with sensitive content. It offers strategies for handling expressions that lack direct equivalents in the target language and addresses the challenges of maintaining cultural integrity while translating taboo topics. This can help improve subtitling practices and ensure that translations are both accurate and culturally appropriate.

Finally, the study paves the way for further research into the translation of taboo terms and expressions across different languages and media. It opens up avenues for exploring how similar challenges are addressed in other cultural contexts and how subtitling practices can be refined to better accommodate sensitive content. This research is a valuable resource for academic scholars, translators, and subtitlers seeking to navigate the complexities of translating culturally and ideologically charged language.

1.7 Limitation of the Study

This study, which analyses the translation of sexual taboo language in the British series *Sex Education*, is constrained by several limitations that may impact the comprehensiveness and applicability of its findings. First and foremost, the research is confined to examining only the first two seasons of the series. This limitation stems from the fact that, at the time of data collection, only these two seasons were produced and available for analysis. Consequently, this restriction may not fully capture the range of translation practices and challenges that might be present across additional seasons or different series.