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A corpus-based study of euphemising body parts in Arabic subtitles

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Drawing on prior taboo classifications and euphemism strategies, this study investigates the euphemisms that result from subtitling private body part-related taboo words (PBPRTW). The study utilised quantitative (frequencies and percentages) and qualitative approaches based on subtitler's linguistic choices and the reasons behind their selection. The sample comprises 75 Hollywood feature films and their Arabic correspondences based on six criteria. The study adopts Pinker's (2007) and McEnery's (2006) for taboo language classifications and Al-Adwan's typology for euphemism strategies, which draws upon Williams (1975), Warren (1992), and Davies (2003). The PBPRTW were selected on the basis of their frequent occurrence in the corpus, appearing more than 150 times. They serve various functions, including descriptive, abusive, referential, and idiomatic. The findings indicated that only approximately 5% of obscene words are retained in Arabic subtitles, while 95% of the English subtitles in the corpus are toned down, euphemised, or omitted. The study identified seven euphemistic strategies employed in dealing with PBPRTW in Arabic subtitles: metaphorical transfer, preservation, implication, metonymy, semantic misrepresentation, and widening. These findings have some implications for subtitlers when translating PBPRTW.

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Introduction

Language is an essential human tool for expressing various emotions, feelings, and concepts, some of which might be sensitive, embarrassing, or inappropriate for communication. In different cultural contexts, people may speak about sensitive and obscene topics differently because of their deep cultural influence on language. Wafi (1983) pointed out that language can be conceived as a vessel of social norms and traditions. In terms of taboos, they generally differ from culture to culture; some cultures are more conservative than others, and when dealing with taboo topics, speakers resort to several euphemistic strategies. Allan and Burridge (2006) postulated that it is customary to use such strategies to talk about distasteful topics in an indirect, polite, and appropriate way that does not cause interlocutors to lose face.

Etymologically, the word *euphemism* is derived from the morphemes *eu*, which means well, and *pheme*, which means speaking, i.e., *euphemism* means 'speaking well'. Euphemism is defined by the *Oxford Dictionary* (2020) as "a mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing." Another similar definition proposed by *Webster's Dictionary* is "the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant." In the literature, there have been many studies that attempted to define the concept of euphemism in a comprehensive manner. Allan and Burridge (1991, p.11) defined euphemism as "an alternative to a dispreferred expression, in order to avoid possible loss of face: either one's own face or, through giving offence, that of the audience, or of some third party". To Willis and Klammer (1981, pp. 192–193) euphemism is touted as "a mild or roundabout word or expression used instead of a more direct word or expression to make one's language delicate and inoffensive even to a squeamish person". As such, the relationship between euphemism and obscenity is obvious. By using euphemisms, people can speak about sensitive issues in an acceptable and polite manner. Fernández (2006, as cited in Gómez, 2009) conceived of euphemism as "the intention of fleeing from the taboo."

Since taboos stem from social, religious, cultural, and political factors, the way people talk about them is impacted by those aspects. Rabab'ah and Al-Qarni (2012) noted that language is influenced by people's traditions and cultural and social norms, which applies to the use of euphemisms. Although some taboo topics such as sex and religion can be culturally universal, others are culturally determined. The severity of such taboos thus varies significantly among cultures. In other words, what might be acceptable in one culture might be offensive in another. Shakoor Rana, a Pakistani cricketer (as cited in Hughes, 1991, p. 32), pointed out that "calling me a bastard may be excusable in England, but here people murder someone who calls another man a bastard". Such varying attitudes toward taboos can pose a daunting challenge for subtitlers, especially in the context of subtitling Hollywood movies, which are produced in a liberal and open culture and target a specific audience.

Taboo language, as a concept, is a broad topic. It includes many types of words that belong to different semantic domains such as sex, excrement, and religion. In this study, the focus is on taboo words that belong to body parts as it is one of the main types of taboo words, relying on data elicited from Hollywood films. PBPRTW is defined by Allan and Burridge (2006, p. 40) as "a language that is a breach of etiquette because it contains so-called 'dirty words'". Although the definition is made for taboo language in general, it applies to PBPRTW, too.

As such, the translation of taboo words presents a challenge for subtitlers. It requires careful consideration of cultural sensitivities and linguistic nuances. While previous studies have examined the translation of taboo words in general, there remains a significant gap in research concerning a specific area: private body part-related taboo words (PBPRTW). Hence, the main focus of the study at hand is on the translation of PBPRTW in Hollywood films subtitled into Arabic. It is motivated by the global reach of Hollywood films and diverse viewership. Besides, with its distinct cultural and linguistic characteristics, Arabic presents striking challenges in translating PBPRTW, influenced by prevalent cultural and religious norms. Arguably, investigating the rendering of PBPRTW in Arabic subtitles provides a valuable opportunity to explore the interplay between cultural sensitivity, linguistic adaptation, and audiovisual translation.

The present study was conducted with the aim to offer practical implications for subtitlers, translation studies, and cross-cultural communication. The findings may benefit professionals engaged in audiovisual translation, such as subtitles and film producers. By comprehending the various euphemism strategies identified in this paper, the translation quality can be enhanced, and the intended meaning of the original contents is preserved. Overlooking specific areas in the literature, viz PBPRTW translation, this study is an attempt to fill in such a crucial gap by providing specialised insights into this particular domain. It addresses the following questions:

1. To what extent are instances of PBPRTW in Hollywood films maintained and euphemised when subtitled in Arabic?
2. What are the euphemism strategies used by Arab subtitlers in dealing with PBPRTW?
3. Is the function of taboo words reflected in the way those words are subtitled?

Definitions:

Seven euphemism strategies were used in this study: metaphorical transfer, preservation, implication, metonymy, semantic misrepresentation, and widening. They are defined, with adequate examples, in light of existing research as follows:

1. **Widening:** This strategy, taken from Williams (1975), refers to using a general word to replace a specific one. Based on this definition, the euphemised word can be particularised using a widening strategy to give the listener a logical connotation. For example, *innocent* is used instead of *virginal*.
2. **Metaphorical transfer:** This strategy generates euphemisms that conceal the offensive associations of the taboo item by referring to something perceived to have similar characteristics to the relevant person or object (Warren, 1992). For example, the use of *blossom* to refer to a *pimple*.
3. **Implication:** This strategy, taken from Warren's model (1992), is defined as switching between two propositions, where the second is usually a logical consequence of the first. For example, *loose* is used to mean *unattached*.
4. **Metonymy:** The profane word is replaced by a word or phrase representing another entity associated with it in a whole–part relationship. For example, the word "*ashes*" refers to "*marijuana*".
5. **Semantic misrepresentation:** This strategy takes place when a semantic misrepresentation leads to the production of a semantically inaccurate or even false representation of the original reference by replacing the relevant (offensive) items with semantically non-equivalent content (euphemisms) (Al-Adwan, 2015). For example, the phrase *go to hell*, can be translated by Arab subtitles as "اغرب عن وجهي" which means *go away*.

6. **Omission:** The omission strategy has been proposed in many previous models, among which are Davies' models (2003). In this study, omission strategy refers to the process when the taboo item is not reproduced in any way in the target text (TT). In the present study, it simply means replacing the taboo item with nothing. For example, the sentence "They put my baby's face on a penis" is subtitled in Arabic as "... لقد وضعوا صورة وجه ابنتي على".

7. **Preservation:** This strategy is proposed by Davies (2003) as a process of rendering the taboo item without making any significant change or adding any material. The only thing being changed using this strategy is the language; no semantic alteration is made. By strict definition, this is not a euphemism strategy because it retains the taboo item in the Arabic subtitles; the term *euphemism strategy* refers to all strategies investigated in this study. For example, the word ball is subtitled in Arabic as "خِصْية" [testicles].

Literature review

Translation of taboo words. Translation of PBPRTW into another language is a complex process that requires a profound understanding of cultural nuances and linguistic subtleties. To meet this requirement, subtitlers tend to use various euphemism strategies to deal with the sensitivities of this topic. Several euphemism strategy studies have explored translating different types of taboo words from English into other languages. For example, Torres-Cuenca (2016) investigated the translation strategies used in the subtitling of taboo words from English into Spanish. The results showed that literal translation was the most frequently used strategy among the other euphemism, neutralisation, and omission strategies. Similarly, Koponen (2018) identified the strategies subtitlers use to translate words of swear, and the most common strategies were omitting swear words in addition to different euphemistic expressions instead of the source taboo words. In a similar vein, Khoshsaligheh, Ameri, and Mehdizadkhani (2018) investigated how Iranian non-professional subtitlers translate taboo words in English films. The results disclosed that the fansubbers used amplifying, deleting, maintaining, mitigating, and substituting strategies. The analysis also showed that in fansubbing taboo words, Iranian fansubbers deviated from the target language norms and retained or preserved the source language's cultural norms regardless of the approval or disapproval of the Iranian audiences.

Euphemism. The concept of euphemism and its various related strategies have been explored in several studies (e.g., Al-Khasawneh, 2018; Rabab'ah and Al-Qarni, 2012; Warren, 1992; Williams, 1975). Williams (1975) proposed six main strategies for achieving euphemism: semantic process, borrowing, widening, semantic shifts, metaphorical transfer, and phonetic distortion. In the same context, Warren (1992) stated that euphemism could be achieved through four major strategies: word-formation devices, phonemic formation, loanwords and semantic innovation. Although both studies are based on detailed analysis of euphemism use, they investigate it in a monolingual rather than a cross-cultural context. In a specifically Arabic context, (Rabab'ah and Al-Qarni, 2012; Al-Khasawneh, 2018) investigated euphemism strategies used by Arabs in spoken daily conversations. Despite the importance of these studies in paving the way to understand how Arabic deals with taboo topics, they were carried out only on spoken and vernacular language, not on the formal register or with a translational perspective. The language used in subtitling (MSA) is formal and belongs to the high register. The difference between spoken and written Arabic is largely due to the diglossia nature of the Arabic language. Diglossia, in this sense, refers to "two languages or language varieties exist side by side in a community and each one is used for different purposes" (Richards and Schmidt, 2013, p. 171).

Several studies employed corpus software, such as Sketch Engine and WordSmith to examine how taboos could be translated in an English-Arabic subtitling. For example, Abdelaal and Al Sarhani (2021) examined the strategies used in translating swear words and taboo expressions from English into Arabic in the 'Training Day' movie. The study evaluated the quality of subtitling these expressions. The results revealed that the subtitlers used different strategies to subtitle swear and taboo words and expressions. The most common strategies used in subtitling this movie conjoined, besides omission strategies, translating the swear and taboo words euphemistically. In addition, Al-Zgoul and Al-Salman (2022) also investigated fansubbers' strategies for translating English culture-bound expressions into Arabic. The corpus of the study consisted of English subtitles and Arabic fansubs of the Bad Boys movies. The findings showed that the fansubbers used seven strategies to translate such expressions: omission, transposition, explicitation, calques, loanwords, lexical creation, and compensation. In another study of the translation of swear words, Abu-Rayyash, Haider, and Al-Adwan (2023) adopted a corpus-assisted approach to explore the translation strategies that Netflix subtitlers used to render English swear words into Arabic. Using the parallel concordance tool in SketchEngine revealed three translation strategies: omission, softening, and swear-to-non-swear. Another closely related study by Haider, Saideen, and Hussein (2023) explored strategies for translating subtitles in the Arabic Vernacular Series Jinn into English. The study classified the culture-bound expressions according to their connotative functions. The subtitles used several strategies to render culture-bound expressions from Arabic into English. These include translating the source culture taboo to a target culture taboo of the same, higher, or lower intensity levels. As noted from these studies, the most common strategy used is omission, followed by euphemism.

As with all the previous studies in this section, there are obvious limitations. For example, numerous studies used one movie or one genre as the data collection source, and thus it is difficult to generalise the findings based on small samples of movies or one genre. Also, several studies lacked specificity; many types of profanity with low frequencies were investigated, and the way offensive words were classified needed to be more specific. For example, 'distasteful topics' could include many words belonging to different semantic categories such as sex and excrement. Also, the functions of taboo items and their impact on how obscenities are euphemised remain under-researched.

The significance of the present study stems from the scarcity of Arabic studies on euphemisms in Arabic subtitles of Hollywood films (Al-Adwan, 2009, 2015; Thawabteh, 2012). Hence, the study intends to address these gaps by focusing on PBPRTW in a corpus of 75 Hollywood films, which is by far the largest parallel corpus of its kind in the Arab world. The scale of this corpus allowed the author to draw some generalisations about the extent to which PBPRTW in Hollywood films is maintained and euphemised when subtitled in Arabic and how subtitlers deal with types of profanity. In addition, investigating the role of taboo function and its impact on the way subtitlers use euphemism strategies should be considered further in Arabic contexts.

Methods

The study followed a corpus-based approach in the sense that the data were taken from 75 Hollywood films (see Appendix A in the

Supplementary Information). The films selected for this study are based on the following six criteria:

1. Genre: The films belong to the major genres such as action, adventure, comedy, drama, and horror to ensure the corpus was balanced across genres and not skewed to any particular genre.
2. Availability: Many DVD movies do not have Arabic subtitles; it was necessary to resort to various video streaming services such as Amazon Prime and Netflix. Also, several movies were rented or bought from the iTunes Store.
3. Rating is another criterion in which the selected movies had to be between 5 and above out of 10 according to IMDB's rating
4. Awards: The films either won awards or were nominated for awards.
5. Date of release: All films were released between 2000 and 2018.
6. Sequels and prequels: Only one film is selected when the movie has more than one part.

Euphemistic strategies. To fit the nature and data of this study, a combination of strategies was identified. The author drew on previous studies (Al-Adwan, 2015; Davies, 2003; Farghal 1995; Williams, 1975; Warren, 1992) to identify how subtitlers deal with PBPRTW. The author conducted a pilot study using two films to determine the applicability of euphemism strategies in the remaining films. The pilot study found that several euphemism strategies are not used in Arabic subtitles, as those strategies are not designed for cross-cultural studies or written translation, such as subtitling into Arabic, but rather in monolingual contexts. To illustrate, the following example shows how the phonetic distortion strategy was used, as proposed by Farghal (1995).

A. Yil/an dik-ak يلعن ديكك
May He damn rooster-your
'Damn your rooster '
B.Yil'n din-ak يلعن دينك
May He damn religion-your
'Damn your religion '

Data extraction. The procedures for collecting the data consisted of several phases. In the first phase, English subtitles were extracted from the movies, and the subtitles were converted to plain text format with SubRip. However, extracting Arabic subtitles were challenging; they contained several errors because some optical character recognition software (e.g., Adobe Acrobat Pro DC) failed to recognise the Arabic characters correctly. The optical character recognition has some limitations when dealing with Arabic subtitles. For instance, many segmentations issues appeared in Arabic subtitles due to the complexity of the writing style and features of Arabic scripts.

In the second phase, Arabic subtitles were aligned with their English counterparts and afterward converted to an Excel sheet so they could be uploaded to a software called Sketch Engine. The Sketch Engine is a leading corpus tool, widely used in lexicography. The Sketch Engine website offers many ready-to-use corpora, and tools for users to build, upload and install their own. It is able to show the root of a given word with its variants. For example, the lemma of words such as *dickhead, dicked, dicky,* and so forth is the word *d****. The lemma for each word related to a body part was searched using the concordance feature, which provides the required context to determine whether a lemma is offensive or not. If the lemma did not belong to a taboo category, it was eliminated from the data set. For instance, the phrase "golf balls" was removed.

Data selection. The English scripts and Arabic subtitles were compared to find out how words related to private parts are translated into Arabic. The euphemism strategies were identified based on the models proposed by some studies (e.g., Williams, 1975; Warren, 1992; Al-Adwan, 2015; Davies, 2003). These models were selected and used in this study because they relate to the nature of translation and can accurately explain the use of euphemisms in subtitling. For the quantitative analysis, the data were transferred to a spreadsheet to code the taboo function for each body part-related word, its frequencies, and the relevant euphemism strategies utilised in Arabic subtitles.

To increase the validity of the classification and identification of taboo functions and euphemism strategies, two Arabic-speaking PhDs in translation studies were asked to randomly review and verify the accuracy of the classifications and suggest any needed changes. After identifying the obscenities related to body parts, it was discovered that the number of items in the corpus was too large to handle, especially since the analysis was to be conducted for each word and involved identifying its linguistic function, euphemism strategies employed, and corresponding Arabic word. Furthermore, the qualitative analysis entailed examining each taboo word's individual occurrence to identify any translational tendencies in subtitlers' linguistic choices as well as any less-than-obvious patterns worth investigating. An analysis of all profanity found in the corpus proved too extensive for this study. As a result, only obscenities that appeared more than 150 times were analysed and studied. Although this cutoff point was somewhat arbitrary, it meant that only obscenities that appeared, on average, at least twice per film were identified. These terms were then classified semantically into body parts based on Allan and Burridge (2006), while the functions of taboo words are grouped based on Pinker (2007) and McEnery (2006), in which obscenities are classified into five functional categories: abusive function, idiomatic function, referential function and descriptive function. Although the classification devised by Pinker (2007) and McEnery (2006) contains more categories and functions, only four functions were used in this study since the study only concerned itself with profanity related to private body parts, not all profanity. After identifying the swear words in the English subtitles, a comparison to the Arabic subtitles was carried out to identify the euphemism strategies adopted in Arabic subtitles, as well as the offensiveness load and degree to which body part-related obscenities in Hollywood films are toned, maintained, euphemised, neutralised and/or omitted when subtitled in Arabic. The author used frequencies and percentages to the extent to which PBPRTW in Hollywood films are maintained and euphemised when subtitled in Arabic and the most common translation strategies used in translating such profane words. Based on the quantitative results, a qualitative analysis was conducted to identify any translational patterns or silent features that emerge in Arabic subtitles when dealing with body part-related profanity and explain possible reasons behind the subtitlers' linguistic choices. The qualitative portion was carried out according to a "pair group" devised by Toury (2012), in which certain segments from the source text are compared to the target texts to determine any generalisability and translational trends in subtitlers' options when subtitling profanity in Hollywood films in Arabic.

Findings and discussion

This section presents quantitative and qualitative answers to the research questions. It was found that PBPRTW occurred more than 150 times (1101 times, 100%) with the word *ass* (45%; $N = 492$), *dick* (25%; $N = 274$), *asshole* (18%; $N = 194$) and *balls* (13%; $N = 141$). These words were used to serve four functions, namely descriptive (40%; $N = 437$), abusive (30%; $N = 326$), referential form (16%; $N = 186$), and idiomatic (14%; $N = 152$).
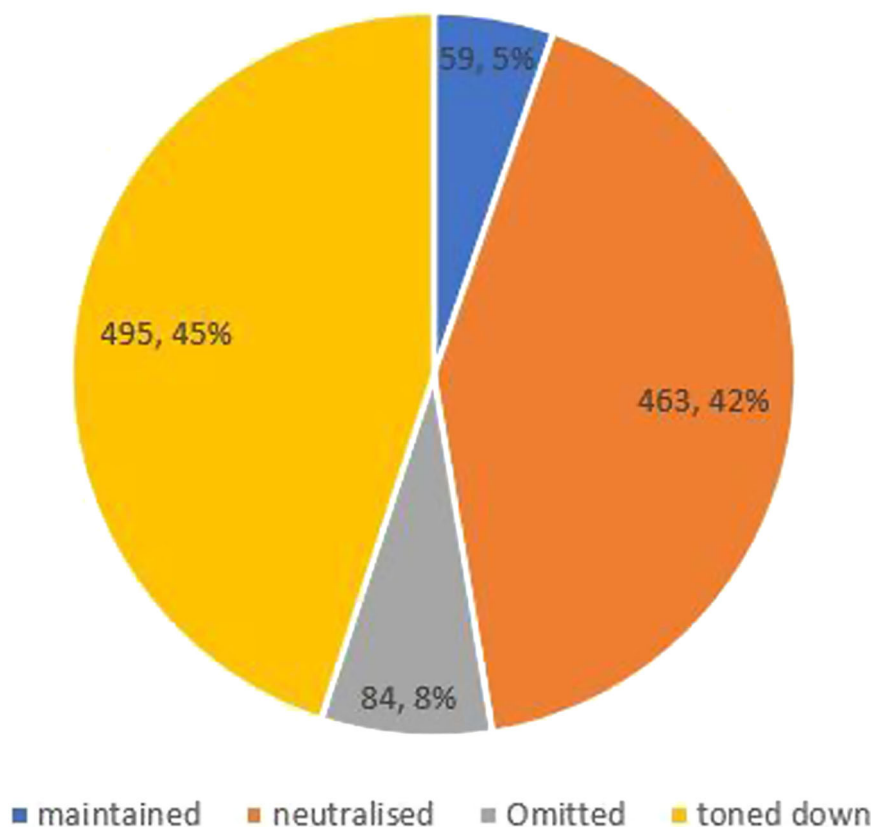
Fig. 1 Offensive load of private body parts in Arabic subtitles. This figure shows that PBPRTW in English subtitles is toned down (45%), omitted (8%), maintained (5%) and neutralised (42%). This figure is covered by the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Table 1 Use of euphemism strategies.		
Euphemism strategies	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Metaphorical transfer	383	35%
Widening	234	21%
Metonymy	215	19.5%
Omission	86	8%
Implication	82	7%
Preservation	58	5%
Semantic misrepresentation	43	4%
Total	1101	100%

As for the first question, results revealed that PBPRTW in English subtitles is toned down, euphemised, and/or omitted in about 95% of the entire corpus: 45% ($N = 495$) for toning down, 42% ($N = 463$) for neutralising and 8% for omission ($N = 84$). This finding revealed the absence of offensiveness load, except with 45% ($N = 495$), where private part-related words in English subtitles were replaced by euphemised, corresponding formal Arabic words. At the same time, the results showed that only about 5% of private part-related words in English subtitles were maintained, and there was no toning of items, indicating how heavily the names of private parts were euphemised (see Fig. 1).

Findings revealed that seven euphemism strategies were utilised in dealing with PBPRTW in Arabic subtitles: metaphorical transfer, preservation, implication, metonymy, semantic misrepresentation, and widening (see Table 1).

As can be seen in Table 1, PBPRTW occurred in 1101 cases, serving four functions: referential, abusive, descriptive, and idiomatic. The most common functions were the descriptive and abusive functions, which accounted for about 40% (437 times)

and 30% (326 times), respectively of the total occurrences of PBPRTW. Seven euphemism strategies were used, with the widening strategy at the top of the list, occurring 234 times out of 1101, followed by the metaphorical transfer strategy at 215 times. Notably, certain euphemism strategies were used with certain taboo words and functions. For instance, the metaphorical transfer strategy tended to occur with the idiomatic function and metonymy with the referential function. An account of the relationship between euphemism strategies and taboo functions in addition to some examples from the qualitative analysis is discussed in the following sections.

Descriptive function. Results in Table 2 revealed that descriptive usage of profanity was the most common function in this corpus, with a total of 437 uses out of 1101. It was used 186, 133, and 101 times for the words *dick, ass,* and *balls,* respectively. The word *asshole* did not appear frequently in this function. Although the descriptive usage of PBPRTW, unlike other functions, tended to be similar in English and Arabic. This can be seen in the use of the widening strategy, which was employed in 199 cases (45%) of this function. For example, the word *ass* is subtitled with the widening strategy in about 72% of its occurrences. The following example illustrates this point.

English dialogue: Eat my *fucking* Irish *ass*!

Arabic subtitle	English back translation
قَبّلي مُؤخِرَتي الإيرلندية اللعينة!	Kiss my damned Irish back

Euphemism strategy is Widening.

As the example shows, in 78 out of 133 cases, the word *ass* was translated into Arabic as مؤخرة [*back*]. The Arabic equivalent is a

Table 2 Descriptive function.

Private parts	Implication	Metaphorical transfer	Metonymy	Omission	Preservation	Semantic misrepresentation	Widening	Total
Ass	4	3	21	6		3	96	133
Asshole	1	2	3	1			10	17
Balls	4	10	10	15	57	1	4	101
Dick	51	6	17	15	1	7	89	186
Total	60	21	51	37	58	11	199	437

euphemised and less offensive version of the English one, which can be used in general contexts to refer to the backs of things such as trains, cars, troops, and so forth. It does have a sexual connotation when used in certain contexts like the one above. A possible explanation for using the Arabic word مُؤخِرة [*back*] involves the constraints imposed by ideological and cultural norms, which make explicit reference to the word *ass* a violation of these norms. In addition to the linguistic constraints of a formal language like MSA that, in subtitling, forces subtitlers to use only formal corresponding words that comply with MSA norms. Such corresponding words are not as offensive as the original word since they belong to the formal and high register of MSA, and consequently are far more polite than either spoken Arabic or English ones. In this regard, Thawabteh (2012) stressed the notion that the use of MSA is itself an effective euphemistic tool, indicating how heavily profanity is toned down. Also, in this corpus it was found that the collocation accompanying many obscenities in English was different from their Arabic equivalents. In English, there were about five instances in which the word *eat* was paired with *ass*, while in Arabic subtitles, the word *eat* was replaced by either *lick* or *kiss*. Although the word *kiss* can have a particular and idiomatic meaning in English, this is not the case in Arabic.

Similarly, the word *dick* occurred 186 times in the descriptive function. It was translated into Arabic as عُضْو [*organ*] 79 times, جَسَد أو ضَمير [*body/pronoun*] 27 times, and قَضيب [*rod*] 24 times. As can be seen in the Arabic equivalents adopted in Arabic subtitles, subtitlers opted for a more general term to avoid the sensitive nature and offensiveness of the word *dick*, regardless of the accuracy of the subtitles. Words such as عُضْو [*organ*] and جَسَد أو ضَمير [*body/pronoun*] are general terms that can be used in multiple contexts; thus, they might be ambiguous as their taboo reference is subtle and implicit. This means viewers need to work harder to ascertain the intended meaning. The following example illustrates this further:

English dialogue: You know how many foods are shaped like *dicks*?

Arabic subtitle	English back translation
أتعرف كم من الأطعمة التي لها شكل الأعضاء؟	You know how many foods have the shape of organs?

Euphemism strategy is Widening.

As the examples show, the English phrase "shaped like *dicks* was subtitled in Arabic as لها شَكل الأعْضَاء ["has organs' shape"]. This tones down the harshness of the profanity. As the widening strategy renders it a more general term, its reference to male genitalia cannot be fully understood since the word أعْضَاء [*organ*] can refer to many other body parts, and in this example, the context is food, which might be surprising and confusing for viewers. Such ambiguity aims at mitigating the severity and offensiveness of the profanity and complying with the cultural conventions of the target audience. Also, subtitlers may intentionally keep the Arabic subtitles ambiguous so only adults can realise the sexual connotations. This may help shield children

or young adults from the intended meanings of certain words. However, in some cases, excessive ambiguity may cause confusion and misunderstanding, affecting the audience's enjoyment of and immersion in the film. An example of this is as follows: "because Teddy ain't got no *dicks* subtitled into Arabic as لأن "تيدي" ليس لديه جَسَد ["because Teddy has no body"]. The subtitles avoid the taboo element at the expense of clarity and idiomaticity. The Arabic subtitle in this example affects viewers' immersion in and enjoyment and experience of the film. Such linguistic choices demonstrate the strict norms and conventions of Arabic culture, which do not tolerate profanity at any offensiveness level.

The implication strategy was used more frequently with the descriptive function than any other function: 60 out of a total of 82 times. The word *dick* was used 51 times, accounting for 62% of total occurrences. Such big percentages indicate that even the descriptive use of taboo words is considered offensive and unacceptable, despite the similarity between English and Arabic in using taboo words descriptively and literally (versus abusively or idiomatically). However, because Arabic culture tends to be intolerant of profanity on the screen, subtitlers must creatively indirectly transfer intended meanings. For example, in many instances, Arab subtitlers tended to link the word *dick* with manhood, muscularity, and bravery, suggesting power, masculine activities and so on to avoid the sensitivity of taboo elements. The following sentence gives a clear example of this strategy.

English dialogue: His *dick* is this big!

Arabic subtitle	English back translation
رُجُولِيَته بهذا الحَجْم!	His masculinity is of this size!

Euphemism strategy is Implication.

In the example above, the word *dick* was euphemised with a reference to another implicit word, concealing its offensiveness yet at the same time conveying its overall meaning. A possible reason for using words such as رُجُولة [*masculinity*] in Arabic subtitles can be related to the cultural background of Arabs: *dick* conflates a masculine society with virility, dominance, authority, and power. In much of Arabic folklore and mythology, the notion of masculinity is derived from male genitalia. At the same time, castration and erectile dysfunction are stigmas signifying the loss of masculinity and the attendant status. Therefore, the penis is a symbol of masculinity, manhood, and virility, and these words, being more implicit in meaning, can mitigate the harshness and directness of PBPRTW in Arabic subtitles. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the nature of audiovisual translation—i.e., meaning can be achieved through a gesture, movement, or nonverbal act—may affect subtitlers' linguistic choices. They may find the gestures of an actor enough to convey the meaning of taboo words, though implicitly and partially. For example, the actress in the last example used her hand to indicate to the size of the penis in question, which in return may make subtitlers adopt certain euphemism strategies, given that what is shown on the screen is enough for the audience to infer the intended meaning.

In the same vein, in some cases, subtitlers went further in using euphemism to link penis size to masculinity. For example, the

Table 3 Abusive function.

	Implication	Metaphorical transfer	Metonyms	Omission	Semantic misrepresentation	Widening	Total
Ass	1	7	21	11	17	21	78
Asshole	0	171	0	6	0	0	177
Dick	1	66	0	4	0	0	71
Total	2	244	21	21	17	21	326

phrase "all you're concerned with is whether or not your *dick* is bigger than his" was subtitled as "وكل ما يهمك هو إن كنت أكثر رُجُولةً مِنه؟" ["all you care about is if you are more manly than him"]. This translation connected penis size to virility, strength, and manhood. Regardless of its accuracy, the subtitle allowed subtitlers to avoid embarrassing comparisons and offensive words. Therefore, euphemism strategies such as widening and implication were the most common strategies used with profanity in the descriptive function category, which clearly indicates the rigid restrictions imposed by social and cultural conventions on the translation of sensitive content.

In addition to the social and cultural norms of the target language, which control the way taboo language is translated, the degree of acceptance of profanity varies significantly among cultures. This is especially true with Arabic and English because they belong to different cultural, social, political, and religious systems. This can be seen in the use of the semantic misrepresentation strategy; the Arabic versions of English obscenities were semantically different. For instance, subtitlers replaced the taboo body part with another, non-taboo body part, as the following illustrates:

English dialogue: I scratch my back with a whale's *dick*, and I loofah my chest with his *balls* sack.

Arabic subtitle	English back translation
أخدش ظَهري بِذَيْل حوت وأفرك صدري به	I scratch my back with a whale's **tail** and rub my chest with it.

Euphemism strategy is Semantic misrepresentation.

In this example, the taboo words, namely *dick* and *balls* have been semantically shifted and replaced by another body part that does not belong to the taboo category, vis the tail. While the second taboo word is substituted by a pronoun that refers to the tail too. Subtitles may find it embarrassing and inappropriate to render the taboo items in Arabic, pushing them to come up with creative options like replacing taboo body parts with other non-taboo words. Another possible explanation for such a tendency in Arabic subtitles could be linked to the shift from spoken language to written language which makes the taboo harsher and obscener in written form (Ivarsson and Carroll, 1998). In other words, where the shift from spoken and slangy language to a formal and high register language such as MSA, many linguistic and cultural features will be missing as a result of this shift. On the other hand, the conservative nature of Arabic culture makes the level of acceptability of taboo words varies significantly between Arabic and English. This can be seen in examples where more than two taboo words occur in the source text, while Arabic subtitles may contain only one Arabic euphemized correspondence, or maybe an omission strategy is applied to avoid offensiveness. The following example explains this notion further:

English dialogue: I'm gonna *fuck* your wife with my giant *dick*.

Arabic subtitle	English back translation
سَأعَاشِر زوجتك	I will **socialise** with your wife.

Euphemism strategy is Omission.

The above example shows how the deletion of a taboo body part can safeguard the viewer from exposure to shocking and culturally inappropriate subtitles. Also, the context in which a word occurs may explain the use of omission. In this case, the nature and sacredness of the marital bond between husband and wife make the term "giant *dick*" more offensive, so the subtitlers chose to tone down the degree of severity by euphemising the first profanity and omitting the second one. By doing so, the overall meaning of the whole sentence is delivered without being very shocking and violating the target cultural norms. Moreover, the excessive use of profanity is not preferred in Arabic subtitles due to the use of formal Arabic language. The impact of using MSA can be seen not only in the deletion of excessive occurrences of profanity in the source text but also in using formal lexical words as equivalents in Arabic subtitles. Thawabteh (2012, p. 15) pointed out that using MSA is itself an effective tool for euphemism.

It is worth mentioning that some profane words in English subtitles cannot be omitted without destroying the meaning of the sentence; the Arabic subtitles would not match the feeling being expressed on the screen. Therefore, Arab subtitlers find themselves obliged to translate such words by resorting to various euphemism strategies to keep the plot cohesive and the taboo's function clear. This may explain the infrequent use of the omission strategy in this study—it only made up about 8% of total strategy use, or 86 out of 1101 times.

Preservation was the least frequent strategy used in this study, occurring in about 5% of total cases, or 57 times, all of which involved the word *balls*. In all of the occurrences of preservation, the Arabic word خِصْية [testicles] was used, which belongs to the formal medical field. However, it is also used in spoken language, as there are no widely known synonyms for it in the Arabic language. This might be the reason the word *balls* is the only word subtitled with the preservation strategy.

Abusive function. The abusive and insulting function was the second most common function of PBPRTW. This occurred in 326 cases, accounting for about 30% of total occurrences of obscenities. The words *ass, asshole,* and *dick* were used, while the word *balls* were not (see Table 3).

In this function, the metaphorical transfer strategy dominated. It was used 244 times, or 75% of the total usage of the abusive function. This dominance reflects the cultural difference between English and Arabic, between which the use of PBPRTW for abusive purposes varies remarkably. In other words, words such as *dick, ass,* and *asshole* are used for insulting people in the English language but not in Arabic, and literal transfer of these insults would result in an unidiomatic translation and consequently in failed communication. Arab subtitlers tended to translate offensive elements by using various words with similar meanings, mainly وغد [scoundrel], حقير [low], غبی [stupid], لعين [damned], and سافل [vile]. They maintained the original words' offensiveness and abusiveness without any connection to taboo body parts; hence, their versions were softer and less offensive than the originals. The following excerpt illustrates how Arab subtitlers treated the abusive form of the word *dick*.

Table 4 Referential function.

Row labels	Implication	Metaphorical transfer	Metonyms	Omission	Semantic misrepresentation	Widening	Total
Ass	13	12	132	15	3	9	184
Dick	1	0	1		0		2
Total	14	12	133	15	3	9	186

English dialogue: Don't be such **a** *dick*!

Arabic subtitle	English back translation
الا تكن حقيرا هكذا!	Don't be so **low**!

Euphemism strategy is Semantic misrepresentation.

As the example shows, the profane expression was subtitled as الا تكن حقيرا هكذا [literally, "don't be low"] to be idiomatic, as Arabs do not use the word *dick* as an insult. In this example and other similar examples, subtitlers resorted to changing the semantic domain of the English word so the Arabic version complied with Arab cultural norms, making the subtitles less offensive and more acceptable to an Arab audience. The PBPRTW was translated using words that belong to other semantic categories, such as mental disability or even religious ones, as in the case of using "damned" as an Arabic translation for the word *dick*. The same applies to the word *asshole*, which occurred with the abusive function 177 times, from which spawned the words سافل [vile] (44 times), غبى [stupid] (43 times), حقير [low] (25 times), أحمق [fool] (21 times) and وغد [scoundrel] (17 times). These Arabic equivalents adopted in Arabic subtitles have nothing to do with body parts; they belong to different semantic fields. This can be attributed to the cultural difference between English and Arabic, specifically their differing uses of PBPRTW; Arabic does not use such words for abusive purposes, at least within the MSA register, which made subtitlers translate the original obscenities' sense, not their metaphorical element. The dominance of the metaphorical transfer strategy and the impact of cultural norms are not confined to the abusive function; they include the idiomatic function. The analysis of the idiomatic function is discussed in the section 'Idiomatic function').

Referential function. This function is derived from McEnery (2006), used when obscenities refer to another person, object, part, etc. In this study, this function appeared 186 times in total; about 99% of the time, it occurred with the word *ass* (184 times). The most common strategy used in this function was metonymy, which was adopted in 132 cases, representing about 72% of all occurrences of this function (see Table 4).

In this function, the word *ass* is used to perform a referential function, referring to the entire person, not to a specific body part. However, this is not the case in Arabic, which means cultural differences in the way profanity is used can be significant factors in employing certain euphemism strategies in Arabic subtitles. The following was one of many examples that occurred repeatedly, and subtitlers often dealt with such cases in the same way.

English dialogue: Get his *ass* out of here!

Arabic subtitle	English back translation
اخرجه من هنا!	Get him out of here!

Euphemism strategy is Metonymy.

In this and other similar examples, Arab subtitlers tended to avoid using the word *ass*, which might be awkward and bizarre for Arab audiences. They opted to use personal pronouns to make

their Arabic versions idiomatic and read smoothly. Hence, we can conclude that the way people swear in Arabic and English is different, and this affects subtitlers' choice of strategies when dealing with English obscenities. In other words, due to cultural differences between English and Arabic, subtitlers opt for choices that comply with Arab cultural and linguistic norms and prioritise a translation's acceptability over its accuracy.

One reason for avoiding profanity in Arabic subtitles is the diglossia nature of the Arabic language. The formal language, MSA, is not used in Arabs' daily spoken conversations; rather, it is a formal and high register used by educated people and in media, law, and educational institutions. Using informal and obscene words in Arabic subtitles would violate linguistic and cultural norms and would be odd to Arabic viewers. Another reason for avoiding profanity in Arabic subtitles can be attributed to registerial differences between spoken English, in which profane words are uttered, and the Arabic written language used in subtitling. The next section discusses another function of PBPRTW in the context of this study.

Idiomatic function. The idiomatic function in this study was the least frequently used, with 152 occurrences, representing about 14% of obscenities. As shown in Table 5, three profanities related to body parts were used in this function: *ass*, *balls*, and *dick*—97, 40, and 15 times, respectively.

The idiomatic use of such words varies among languages and cultures, as idioms are culturally embodied. In other words, in one language, a taboo word might be used idiomatically to refer to a concept; however, its literal transfer to another language would be awkward, ambiguous, and unidiomatic. For example, the word *balls* is used to refer to boldness and courage in the English language but not in the formal Arabic context. This reflects the metaphorical transfer strategy, which enables subtitlers to translate only the sense of taboo items without their taboo element. The metaphorical transfer strategy is used in about 70% of all occurrences of profanity performing an idiomatic function, or 106 times out of a total of 152 times. This is illustrated in the following example:

English dialogue: …have the *balls* to teach people about self-discipline?

Arabic subtitle	English back translation
أن يتجرأ ويعلم الناس ضبط النفس؟	…to **dare** to teach people self-control?

Euphemism strategy is Metaphorical transfer.

The example shows how the idiomatic sense of the profane word was removed by using the metaphorical transfer strategy, retaining only the general meaning of the profanity. Such strategies result from the cultural differences between English and Arabic, where the idiomatic functions of obscenities vary significantly. In such cases, it is challenging to maintain the taboo item and its idiomatic sense in Arabic subtitles, which forces subtitlers to sacrifice the taboo element and only preserve its overall meaning.

Table 5 Idiomatic function.

	Implication	Metaphorical transfer	Metonyms	Omission	Semantic misrepresentation	Widening	Total
Ass	5	67	5	9	6	5	97
Balls	0	28	5	2	5	0	40
Dick	1	11	0	2	1	0	15
Total	6	106	10	13	12	5	152

Here, the word *balls* is used idiomatically to mean courage or daring to do something. Therefore, the Arabic word جرأة [courage/dare] was used 18 times to refer to the idiomatic usage of the word *balls*. Thus, the general meaning of the idiomatic expression was conveyed without including the taboo item in the subtitle. Unlike in the English language, the word for testicles is not used in Arabic to refer to courage and bravery; hence, the meaning will be distorted when translating the profanity as it is. In this case, subtitlers opted for a synonymous word or expression with the same meaning as the offensive element, so the metaphorical sense of the profanity was not retained.

Furthermore, due to cultural differences and distances between English and Arabic, some idiomatic uses of taboo words may have different meanings. For example, the word for testicles in the formal and written register of the Arabic language does not refer to courage or manliness, but in some southern spoken dialects of Arabic (not the formal written Arabic), the word testicles is used to describe someone who is coward, which is opposite from the English language. This is true only in some southern spoken dialects of the Arabic peninsula, and not in the formal and high register of written Arabic.)

In some cases, obscenities related to body parts were used idiomatically for humorous purposes; however, such humour tended to be lost in Arabic subtitles due to either the absence of profanity or the use of various euphemism strategies. This can be related to the shift from spoken language to a formal register, in which many linguistic features such as humour are heavily affected or lost. The following example explains this concept further:

Smooth as a baby's ass!

Arabic subtitle	English back translation
يجري كل شيء بلا...مشاكل!	Everything runs without any problems.

Euphemism strategy is Metaphorical transfer.

As the example shows, the word *ass* is used idiomatically, and when subtitlers encountered this simile, they tended to deal with it in a roundabout manner to comply with the norms of the recipient culture. Consequently, the essential humorous function of this taboo word was lost. In such cases, subtitlers were forced to render only the overall sense and meaning of the taboo item, and its idiomatic and figurative aspects were lost. This could account for the widespread use of the metaphorical transfer strategy when subtitlers dealt with both taboo words used idiomatically. Such subtitles risk losing films' intended message, as obscenities are not used arbitrarily in films: they have a function that producers, actors, etc. want to deliver (Soler Pardo, 2011). However, when many obscenities are absent in Arabic subtitles, the audience's enjoyment will be negatively affected. For instance, 45 min of a film named *The Wolf of Wall Street* were cut and censored due to the excessive use of profanity and sexual content. Such control indicates the rigid conventions and norms of Arabic culture; at the same time, it indicates how different the Arabic version is from the original one.

The findings revealed a relation between the use of euphemism strategies and functions of profanity, correlating the use of certain strategies with certain functions: the metonymy strategy with the referential function, the semantic misrepresentation strategy with the abusive function, the widening strategy with the descriptive function and the metaphorical transfer strategy with the idiomatic function. These findings align with those of Ávila-Cabrera (2015; 2020); Khoshsaligheh, et al. (2018); Al-Yasin and Rabab'ah (2019) and Sahari (2017). They found that most swear words are either omitted or heavily euphemized in the translated versions.

Finally, the author found that the use of MSA in Arabic subtitles is another influential factor leading subtitlers to use formal words when dealing with taboo words. This resulted in the loss of many of the taboo words' features, such as humour and density, and alteration of the films' intended message. There is, therefore, a definite need to maintain at least the functions of offensive words, even if it is challenging to maintain the same levels of offensiveness.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to explore how euphemism strategies are used in dealing with private body part-related taboo words (PBPRTW). The study was based on a corpus of 75 movies. It utilised quantitative and qualitative approaches. The results showed that the rigid conventions and norms of the target culture heavily influence subtitlers. five percent of the profanities of the 75 Hollywood films analysed in this study were transferred explicitly in the Arabic subtitles, while the remaining were translated using euphemism strategies. This indicates that cultural differences between English and Arabic make the translation of taboo words problematic, and subtitlers resort to various euphemism strategies to tone down the obscenity of taboo English words.

The findings also revealed the relation between euphemism strategies and functions of profanity, correlating the use of specific strategies with certain functions: (a) the metonymy strategy with the referential function (133 out of 186, which represents 71.50%), (b) the Metaphorical transfer strategy with the abusive function (244 out of 326, which represents 74.84%), (c) the widening strategy with the descriptive function (199 out of 437, which represents 45. 53%), and (d) the metaphorical transfer strategy with the idiomatic function (106 out of 152 which represents 69.73%). This resulted in the loss of many of the taboo words' features, such as humour and density, and alteration of the films' intended message. There is, therefore, a definite need to maintain at least the functions of offensive words, even if it is challenging to maintain the same levels of offensiveness.

The findings of this study exposit practical implications. First, the subtitlers may opt for keeping the functions of profanity if the case is challenging to maintain the level of offensiveness due to cultural and linguistic constraints. Moreover, many essential elements of films conveyed through profane language may be lost, such as the strengths of emotions and humorous effects and the intended messages of films and their characterisations, because profane words serve specific functions in films. Thus, subtitlers need to be aware of that. Profanity serves as an important linguistic marker that promotes stereotypes and assists viewers in

creating a situational and sociocultural profile of the various characters that increase expectations for the story. As a result, subtitlers need to be aware of the fact that taboo words can reveal information about a character's idiolect or the group's sociolect and about the communicative situation. Misinterpreting subtitles may lead to an altered experience in the audience's understanding and enjoyment of the content.

Limitations and further research. A limitation of this study is that the data were limited to a large corpus of official DVD film versions. Another limitation relates to the subtitles produced by fans (fansubbing); they are not included in this study despite their popularity in the Arabic context. Based on these limitations, it would be useful to study other forms of audiovisual translation, such as dubbing, or subtitles produced by fans (fansubbing). Including multimedia corpus in similar studies could yield interesting results. Also, the perception of subtitled materials is another under-researched area. It would be interesting to determine how Arab viewers receive certain Hollywood films, with reference to euphemisms of culturally sensitive elements. Another possible avenue of research is a diachronic analysis of Arabic subtitling to explore any tendencies regarding offensive language in subtitling over time.

Data availability
The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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