

The Difficulties of Subtitling Yemeni Arabic Effective Similes into English

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Article History:

First Received:
01-08-2025

Final Revision:
23-12-2025

Available online:
31-12-2025

Abstract. Audiovisual translation is a significant element of media consumption worldwide, particularly for non-native speakers. Subtitling is predominant in audiovisual translation across the Arab region; however, there are only a few training schools and universities that can adequately prepare subtitlers for entry into the industry. The present study seeks to identify a major difficulty Arabic-speaking subtitlers encounter when translating effective simile phrases from colloquial Arabic to English. The study examines the strategies pursued by ten MA candidates in the MA in Audiovisual Translation at Sana'a University in their handling of Arabic effective similes during subtitling exercises. The study found that four primary strategies are pursued by MA candidates: converting an effective simile into sense, reproducing a similar image in the target language, substituting the source-language image with a conventional target-language image, and pursuing a literal translation. The study identifies a greater need for enhanced pedagogy and subtitling training in the Arab region to address such challenges and improve subtitling quality. The researcher recommends increased exposure to audiovisual materials with complex simile phrases during training, as well as encouraging students to study and read pertinent works on the subject to become professional subtitlers with a solid academic foundation.

Keywords: *Translation; Subtitling, similes, Pedagogy, training, Translation Strategies, Yemeni Dialect.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Audiovisual content is an essential component of contemporary communication, education, and entertainment, reflecting global viewers' social and cultural life. Cinema, in particular, has a strong power to construct culture and facilitate intercultural communication (Mariottini, 2012). However, subtitling audiovisual content is particularly linguistically and culturally demanding. Subtitlers must not only achieve semantic coherence but also maintain the intended emotional and pragmatic effect of the original dialogue (Cintas & Remael, 2007; Abdalla, 2018).

Subtitling, a core activity in Audiovisual Translation (AVT), requires subtitlers not just technical competence, but also profound intercultural expertise. According to Leppihalme (2016), a good subtitler must be "sufficiently bicultural" and able to work both as an efficient reader of the source language (SL) and as a productive creator in the target language (TL). This dual competence is particularly crucial in subtitling culturally loaded phrases such as idioms, metaphors, and similes, where direct translation can easily distort sense or weaken pragmatic impact.

While English-to-Arabic subtitling has long been established in the Arab world, the reverse process—Arabic-to-English subtitling—has only recently gained focus, specifically in the context of Egyptian films (Al-Adwan & Thawabteh, 2021). Despite the expanding demand for subtitlers, formal instruction in AVT is not available in most Arab countries. As Gamal (2009) notes, AVT is not a separate subject, and when it is taught, it is usually offered as an optional module within translation studies. Such a deficiency in specialized training and research creates significant hurdles, especially when subtitlers encounter language with cultural inclinations to be translated contextually rather than literally. Similarly, there are very few universities that offer Audiovisual Translation (AVT) as a separate academic course, and most institutions offer it only as an elective component of their undergraduate or postgraduate translation courses (Díaz Cintas, 2014). The lack of specialized AVT programs is one of the causes of the wide research gap, particularly in subtitling culturally specific linguistic phenomena such as similes. Previous research has examined general challenges in subtitling figurative language (Pedersen, 2007; Chiaro, 2009; Al-Adwan & Al-Jabri, 2023), but very few, if any, have examined the subtitling of Yemeni Arabic similes into English. This means that empirical research is required to understand the linguistic and cultural issues at stake and to develop solutions for effective translation in audiovisual contexts.

One of the most challenging cases is that of Yemeni Arabic similes, which closely resemble the native environment and culture. For instance, the Yemeni proverb "الدفي نصف العلافه" ("Warmth is half of your food") is interpreted metaphorically as invoking the cultural idea that bodily warmth is essential to health, just as food intake is. A word-for-word equivalent might preserve the surface sense ("Warmth is half of your food") but fail to pass on the cultural implication that

warmth is good health and moderation. An attempt at adaptive translation, such as "Good health is a balanced meal," might manage to achieve the desired pragmatic effect among English listeners but might remove the local iconography of Yemeni life. This clash is the essence of the dilemma subtitlers face: balancing cultural fidelity and audience comprehension under tight technical and temporal constraints.

In theory, such a dilemma can be analyzed within Skopos Theory (Reiss et al., 2014), which emphasizes that translation strategies must be driven by the proposed purpose—or skopos—of the translated text in its target setting. As argued by Skopos Theory, the goal of subtitling is not to replicate linguistic forms but to achieve communicative effects that are consistent with the function of translation and the expectations of the target audience. Regarding subtitling Yemeni Arabic similes, it puts the translator's role at the forefront of mediating between fidelity to cultural meaning and functional adequacy in the receiving culture.

Drawing on this theoretical framework, the present study employs a qualitative, descriptive case study research design to examine how translation students tackle effective similes in translating from Yemeni Arabic into English. Through comparative textual analysis and thematic coding, the study examines the strategies utilized and the frequent challenges faced by trainee subtitlers in addressing cultural, linguistic, and technical constraints. It indicates that subtitle translation of similes is particularly significant because similes are rich in cultural meaning and serve a key function in conveying the source culture's worldview and values. Translation of similes requires, apart from linguistic appropriateness, also sensitivity to culture, and for this reason, it is one of the most crucial areas of research in AVT.

This research enriches the under-researched field of Arabic-to-English AVT by investigating a linguistic feature—good similes—within a specific dialectal context. In contrast to previous research on Egyptian or Levantine varieties, this research highlights Yemeni Arabic, introducing new empirical evidence concerning its subtitling challenges and potential remedies. In addition, through examination of learners' subtitling performance, the study reveals pedagogical implications for AVT teaching in the Arab world, where subtitlers typically have limited exposure to systematic training in dialectal and culturally aware translation.

Compared to previous research (Gamal, 2009; Al-Adwan & Thawabteh, 2021; Al-Hamzi, et al., 2023), which is about translating and subtitling practice in a generic sense, the current study focuses on three main distinctions: (1) it investigates the Yemeni Arabic variety, a previously disadvantaged variety in AVT research; (2) it treats similes as culturally marked figure of speech that requires interpretive rather than literal translation; and (3) it adopts Skopos Theory as a guiding framework for assessing the purpose of translation and cultural functionality. These differences reinforce the theoretical and practical contributions of this study.

The rapid expansion of audiovisual media in the digital age has intensified the need for effective audiovisual translation (AVT), positioning it as a central area of inquiry within contemporary translation studies. Audiovisual translation refers

to the transfer of linguistic and cultural meaning across languages through multimodal texts that combine sound, image, and written language. Among the various AVT modes—such as subtitling, dubbing, voice-over, and audio description—subtitling remains the most widely used method for facilitating cross-linguistic accessibility (Gambier & Pinto, 2018; Mahdi & Sahari, 2024). However, subtitling is not a purely linguistic operation; rather, it is a complex semiotic and cultural practice that requires translators to mediate meaning under severe technical and contextual constraints.

Audiovisual translation theory has emerged as a response to these complexities, drawing on insights from translation studies, linguistics, film studies, and cultural studies (Cintas & Piñero, 2016). Central to AVT theory is the recognition that translation in audiovisual contexts involves the transfer of culture as much as language. Here, subtitling is one of the most common forms of audiovisual translation used today. It involves transcribing speech into written form, which is then projected on the screen alongside the audiovisual content. Subtitling is difficult in several respects for translators, such as the limited space available for the text and the need to synchronize the subtitle with the audiovisual content (Cintas & Remael, 2014). Dubbing, on the other hand, involves substituting the original soundtrack with a new one in the target language. Dubbing is also most commonly used in countries where audiences do not read subtitles, such as Italy and Spain (Pérez-González, 2019).

Voice-over is also an audiovisual translation technique, in which a new audio track is added to the original audio, with the original audio still heard in the background. Voice-over is widely used in documentary and news shows, where the native sound plays an important role (Pérez-González, 2018). Finally, audio description involves adding verbal narration to the show's visual content for blind viewers. Audio description aims to provide an inclusive audiovisual experience to all viewers (Matamala et al., 2016). Therefore, the theory of audiovisual translation is a rapidly evolving area of research that emerged due to the need for audiovisual translation services. It involves a general framework for thinking about the various modes of translation used in audiovisual media and emphasizes cultural knowledge in translation. The different methods of audiovisual translation, such as subtitling, dubbing, voice-over, and audio description, each present their own challenges and entail distinct translation strategies.

Subtitling, in particular, is a technical form of Audiovisual Translation (AVT) in which verbal language is translated into written text on screen, thereby providing audiovisual content in another language to speakers. It is not merely a linguistic transaction but also a semiotic and cultural act involving the deciphering of meaning within specific social, cultural, and temporal contexts (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007, 2014; Alqawasmeh, 2022). Subtitling, as Gottlieb (2012) reminds us, takes place under multiple kinds of constraints—spatial, temporal, and semiotic—under which the subtitler must compress language in such a way that he/she manages to keep it coherent, rhythmic, and pragmatically meaningful.

Subtitling is especially challenging in Yemeni Arabic because the dialect relies heavily on idiomatic and figurative language, including forceful similes that embed cultural norms and evoke environmental imagery. Such similes are often

pragmatic and moral in import and resistant to literal translation. For example, the Yemeni proverb “الدفى نصف العلافه” (“Warmth is half of your food”) captures a local cultural intuition of comfort and proportion being determinative of health. A literal translation risks misleading or confusing the target audience, while an adaptive translation risks compromising cultural authenticity, illustrating the fine-grained balance the subtitler must achieve between fidelity and functionality.

Skopos Theory (Reiss et al., 2014) provides an appropriate methodology for analyzing such challenges because it centers on the translation's purpose (skopos) as the decision-making criterion. The work of the subtitler is to produce a target text that will fulfill the communicative function of the source text in its new environment. Skopos Theory is employed in this study to explain why subtitlers translate Yemeni similes to meet the cognitive and cultural requirements of English-speaking audiences while maintaining the communicative intention of the original.

Previous studies have focused on the fact that subtitlers must use context-dependent methods to bridge cultures. Pedersen (2011) provides a variety of strategies for translating culture-bound concepts, including retention (keeping the original word), specification (providing explanatory information), direct translation, generalization, substitution, omission, and official equivalent. These solutions can be used flexibly depending on the culture's familiarity and the technical constraints of subtitling. Similarly, Newmark (1988) characterizes processes such as paraphrase, cultural substitution, and descriptive translation as effective methods for conveying figurative meaning without compromising comprehension.

To counteract such limitations, the learners in the present study employed a range of strategies, including referring to footnotes to explain culture-bound terms, paraphrasing, and modifying similes to align with the target culture. These choices are substantiated by Pedersen's (2011) taxonomy and Gottlieb's (2012) subtitling strategies, which recognize the necessity of adapting culture-specific content within temporal and spatial constraints. All the subtitlers documented the motivations for their translation choices and the rationale they used, with examples from their subtitles. This accords with the Skopos approach, which prioritizes communicative function over formal equivalence.

Methodologically, this study used 40 examples of Yemeni Arabic similes from locally produced audiovisual materials. Student subtitlers were asked to subtitle these into English, and their products were then subjected to comparative text analysis. The analysis consisted of three stages: (1) identification and classification of similes in Goatly's (1997) framework (topic, vehicle, and grounds); (2) assessment of translation strategy employed, according to Pedersen's (2011) and Newmark's (1988) frameworks; and (3) translation adequacy assessment by means of qualitative thematic coding. This step-by-step approach facilitated systematic examination of how subtitlers resolved linguistic, cultural, and technical problems.

By blending theoretical frameworks (Skopos Theory, Pedersen's taxonomy, and Newmark's translation procedures) with empirical data from student subtitling, the current study provides a firm analytical foundation. It shows how subtitlers balance cultural meaning with functional readability within AVT limitations, and how these strategies are instances of broader principles of pragmatic and functional equivalence in translation.

Effective similes constitute a particularly demanding category of figurative language in subtitling. It is another literary device that helps express complex ideas and emotions through comparison. Its history dates back to Aristotle's classical definition of metaphor as "the application of a name belonging to one thing to another," a concept reiterated in modern definitions that emphasize analogical similarity between dissimilar objects (Murray & Dorsch, 2000; Newmark, 1988; Dickins, 2005).

Good similes have three components: the topic (the thing being described), the vehicle (the idea or image the thing is described with), and the grounds (shared features between topic and vehicle) (Goatly, 1997). Such an exchange generates new, innovative meaning and contributes to the beauty and knowledge richness of communication.

Although similes once served as poetic ornaments, they have now become integral tools of everyday talk (Pedersen, 2015). They construct perceptions, express emotions, and express cultural values (Schäffner, 2004; Kaplan, 1990). As Lakoff & Johnson (1980) and Sahari (2024) argue, figurative language—i.e., similes—is an expression of the way people conceptualize the world; it is therefore culturally and cognitively embedded. Similes in Yemeni Arabic are not so much rhetorical figures as social artifacts of local sense, values, and experience of the environment. Their translation, therefore, entails both linguistic transfer and cultural interpretation, making it especially problematic for subtitlers who need to balance meaning across varying conceptual systems. For this reason, the understanding and translation of successful similes is sensitive to their cultural specificity. This research thus situates successful similes at the nexus of linguistics, culture, and translation theory, examining how subtitlers employ functional and pragmatic approaches to maintain communicative meaning while ensuring cultural accessibility for non-Arabic viewers.

Accordingly, this study is guided by a set of interrelated research questions and objectives that seek to address the identified gap in Arabic–English audiovisual translation. It investigates the strategies employed by subtitling students when translating culturally salient Yemeni Arabic similes into English, the linguistic and cultural challenges encountered during this process, and the extent to which these strategies succeed in conveying both the intended meaning and the cultural appropriateness of the source text. In line with these questions, the study aims to examine learner-oriented subtitling strategies, identify the major linguistic and cultural constraints affecting simile translation, and evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies in preserving semantic accuracy and cultural specificity. By addressing these objectives, the study provides empirical evidence for Arabic–English subtitling research and offers pedagogical insights relevant to translation training and culturally informed subtitling practice in the Arab world.

RESEARCH METHOD

The current study is grounded in audiovisual translation theory, which entails shifting linguistic and cultural meaning from the source to the target language during audiovisual translation (Gambier & Pinto, 2018). In particular, this study adopts the descriptive qualitative approach to analyze subtitling strategies

within the framework of Gottlieb's (2012) subtitling taxonomy, which classifies strategies such as expansion, paraphrase, transfer, imitation, condensation, and deletion. This framework provides a solid theoretical foundation for examining how students handle similes in subtitling, especially those with culture-bound meanings.

The data for this study are two clips from the famous Yemeni series *Ayni Aynak*, which premiered in 2008 and ran for three seasons. The materials for this study consist of two clips taken from the famous Yemeni series *Ayni Aynak*, which premiered in 2008 and ran for three seasons. The data consist of the effective similes identified in these clips, which serve as the focus of the study's analysis. *Ayni Aynak* is a Yemeni satirical show that addresses various political and social issues in Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula through irony and satire (Chiaro, 2009). The show is known for its use of figures of speech, such as effective similes, which are highly challenging for subtitlers (Chiaro, 2009). The Yemeni dialect used in the show is relatively understandable across the Arabian Peninsula, especially in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula (Watson, 2011).

The study involved ten first-year students enrolled in the Introduction to Subtitling course at the Faculty of Languages, Sana'a University. The students were given an instruction sheet containing background information about the show and its main objectives. They were then asked to subtitle two clips from the series: one discussing robbery and the other reflecting on favoritism and nepotism. The students first watched the two selected clips from the series, one addressing robbery and the other favoritism/nepotism. They were instructed to subtitle all dialogue in these clips in English. After the subtitling task was completed, the researcher extracted all instances of effective similes from the students' translations. These extracted similes then constituted the primary data for detailed analysis of the strategies employed in rendering them. The students faced several problematic issues, including dialectal variation, technical constraints on subtitling (time and space), and cultural and linguistic gaps.

The researcher collected the students' subtitled versions in written SRT format and analysed them comparatively against the original Arabic dialogues. The analysis focused on the occurrence of similes and the strategies employed to render them in English. Each effective simile was identified, categorized according to its linguistic structure, and then evaluated according to the strategy used, following Gottlieb's (2012) model.

To assess translation quality, the study employed a three-step analysis: (1) identification of similes and their contextual meaning in Yemeni Arabic; (2) comparison between source and target subtitles to determine the applied strategy; and (3) evaluative commentary on the effectiveness of each strategy in maintaining the intended meaning and cultural nuance.

To overcome these challenges, the students employed several strategies, including using footnotes to explicate culture-bound expressions, paraphrasing, and modifying similes to align with the target language's culture. These strategies align with Gottlieb's (2012) expansion and paraphrase techniques and Newmark's (1988) theory of communicative translation, both of which emphasize adapting figurative language to preserve functional equivalence in the target culture. The students outlined their rationale for their decisions and documented the processes they followed in translating the similes, with examples from their subtitles to illustrate

such processes. The next section presents a comparative study of the original Arabic dialogue and the students' English subtitles, with reference to metaphorical expressions and the strategies used by the students.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the two clips revealed eight effective simile expressions. The study shows that students applied four primary strategies when translating these similes: interpreting the SL image for meaning, substituting it with a conventional TL image, directly reproducing the SL image in the TL, and translating it literally. Table 1 displays the total occurrences of each strategy, organized by frequency. To ensure accessibility for non-Arabic speakers, all the Arabic similes in the examples below have been translated literally into English (see Table 2).

Table 1. Strategies Employed by Students in Subtitling Yemeni Arabic Effective Similes into English

Strategy	Instances	%
Converting SL image to sense	91	61.4
Replacing SL image with standard TL image	42	28.3
Reproducing the SL image in the TL	11	7.4
Literal Translation	4	2.7
Total	148	

Table 2 presents examples of how students translated Yemeni Arabic effective similes by converting the source language (SL) image into a sense in the target language (TL). In this strategy, the figurative image in the original Arabic is replaced by a more culturally and linguistically accessible English expression that preserves the intended meaning rather than the literal image.

Table 2. Converting SL Image to Sense Examples

No	SL	TL
1	الدفء نصف العلافة Warmth is as half of your food	Good health comes from a balanced meal
2	الصبر حصن الفتى Patience is the fortress of the young man	Patience is the stronghold of the young Patience is the stronghold of the man/woman Patience is the stronghold of people

Table 3 provides additional examples illustrating how students rendered similes by converting the SL image into sense to ensure clarity and naturalness in English. This approach demonstrates the students' attempts to prioritize communicative effectiveness and audience comprehension over literal equivalence.

Table 3. Examples of how students rendered similes by converting the source language (SL) image into sense

No	SL	TL
3	ساعة الرجال ذالحين The men's hour now	It is now the men's time to shine
4	حمار ولقى مرعى A donkey found a pasture	It is like a donkey finding a meadow

4.1. Converting SL image to sense

According to Audiovisual Translation Theory, subtitling requires making choices about how to transfer meaning from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL), while also considering the unique constraints of the medium (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007; Gottlieb, 2012).

In this study, the most frequently used strategy by students for translating Arabic similes into English was “reduction to sense,” as indicated in Table 1. Abdelaal (2019) describes this approach as omitting the vehicle of the SL simile and focusing solely on its topic. For instance, the Arabic expression as shown below:

Example 1

الدفى نصف العلافة

Warmth is as half of the comfort

The above example of data was subtitled by students in English by discarding the original image and conveying only its pragmatic meaning. Since this simile is monocultural, preserving its exact imagery in English proved challenging. Nevertheless, the analysis shows that most students retained the emphatic sense of the original simile, incorporating phrases such as 'warmth' and 'feeling hot' to replicate a similar effect in the English subtitles. Overall, the frequent use of the “reduction to sense” strategy underscores the importance of recognizing cultural and linguistic differences and adopting creative solutions to convey meaning effectively in subtitling.

Example 2

الصبر حصن الفتى

Patience is the fortress of the young man

The use of metaphorical expressions in Audiovisual Translation (AVT) has been a subject of much discussion in recent years. In Example 2, the police's decision to pursue the thieves is expressed using an Arabic metaphor [lit. *Patience is the fortress of the young man*], which poses a challenge to translators. While some students opted to paraphrase the meaning using phrases typical of the target language (TL), others suggested using similes to retain the emotive value of the

original expression. This dilemma underscores the importance of considering both cultural and linguistic differences between the source language (SL) and the TL in AVT, aligning with Díaz Cintas and Remael's (2007) view that subtitling involves balancing fidelity to meaning with the constraints of medium and culture.

According to Audiovisual Translation: Subtitles and Captioning, similes can be used to convey the meaning of metaphorical expressions in AVT (Cintas & Remael, 2014). Similes are particularly useful when the metaphorical expression is culture-specific, as in example 2. By using similes common in the TL, translators can convey the same meaning while preserving the emotive value of the original expression. However, as Bartrina & Espasa (2005) point out, this strategy, known as demetaphorization, can undermine the text's aesthetic value.

The aesthetic value of a text in AVT is closely linked to its emotive and cultural value. Metaphorical expressions can evoke strong emotions and convey cultural connotations that may be lost in translation. In example 2, the Arabic metaphorical expression conveys a sense of strength and resilience, qualities associated with patience, an important value in Arabic culture. By paraphrasing the expression, translators risk losing its emotive and cultural value, which can affect how viewers perceive the characters on screen.

The importance of retaining the emotive and cultural value of metaphorical expressions in AVT is also highlighted in Translation and Emotion: A Psychological Perspective. According to the authors, the use of metaphors in audiovisual texts can enhance emotional engagement and contribute to a more immersive viewing experience (Lyu & Wang, 2018). By using similes that are culturally and emotionally resonant in the TL, translators can achieve a similar effect and enhance the viewing experience for audiences. Therefore, the use of metaphorical expressions in AVT poses a challenge for translators, particularly when the expressions are culture-specific. While demetaphorization is a common strategy for conveying the meaning of metaphorical expressions, it may undermine the text's emotive and cultural value. By using similes that are culturally and emotionally resonant in the TL, translators can retain the emotive value of the original expression and enhance the viewing experience for audiences. The decision to use similes or paraphrase the expression ultimately depends on the specific context and the translator's goals for the translation.

4.2. Replacing the image in the SL with the standard image in the TL Substituting the SL image with a conventional TL image

According to Audiovisual Translation (AVT) theory, translating audiovisual texts involves not only conveying linguistic meaning but also effectively transmitting visual content. In this context, subtitling is one of the most widely used AVT methods, involving the conversion of spoken language from the source language (SL) into written text in the target language (TL) displayed on screen alongside the audio (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2014). Subtitling also requires adapting non-verbal elements, such as visual imagery, for the target culture, a complex task that demands the application of various translation strategies.

In Perez's (2022) study, one of the strategies employed by the students was image substitution, which entails replacing the image in the source language with a corresponding conventional image in the target language. This strategy aims to improve the readability and naturalness of the target text (TT) while preserving the original text's topic. According to Pedersen (2011), image substitution is the replacement of the SL vehicle with a different TT vehicle that shares similar grounds, ensuring the preservation of the topic.

An example of the use of image substitution in subtitling is shown in the students' translation of the simile "ساعة الرجال ذا الحين" in example 3, which literally translates as "the men's hour now." This simile is used when someone being discussed is about facing difficulties, and two people are discussing who is willing to help and stand by people in need. Instead of translating the simile literally, which might confuse the target audience, the students opted to use a standard English image in the TT. Therefore, the English translation of this simile became "It's now the men's time to shine." This substitution reflects the students' awareness of the linguistic and cultural aspects of the TL and their attempt to provide a natural and idiomatic translation that conveys the intended meaning to the target audience. In this case, image substitution is an essential strategy in subtitling to convey non-verbal elements while preserving the original text's topic. This strategy enables the creation of a natural, idiomatic translation that reflects the linguistic and cultural features of the TL. Therefore, subtitlers should consider the effective use of image substitution to enhance the quality of the final product.

Based on Audiovisual Translation (AVT) theory, the translation of audiovisual texts requires not only the transfer of linguistic meaning but also the effective transmission of visual content. In this regard, subtitling, which is one of the most commonly used AVT techniques, involves the transfer of spoken language from the source language (SL) into written language in the target language (TL) displayed on the screen simultaneously with the audio (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2014; Chaume, 2020). However, subtitling also involves transferring non-verbal elements, such as images, into the target culture, a challenging task that requires the use of various translation strategies.

One of the strategies used by students in the study conducted by Perez (2022) was image substitution, which involves replacing the image in the SL with a standard image in the TL. This strategy aims to improve the readability and naturalness of the target text (TT) while preserving the original text's topic. According to Pedersen (2011), image substitution is the replacement of the SL vehicle with a different TT vehicle that shares similar grounds, ensuring the preservation of the topic.

Example 3

ساعة الرجال ذا الحين

Literal translation: *The men's hour now*

It's now the men's time to shine

This simile is used when someone is being discussed as facing difficulties, and two people are debating who is willing to help and stand by those in need. Instead of rendering the simile literally, which might confuse the target audience, the students opted for a *standard TL image* that would convey the intended meaning naturally and idiomatically. This reflects their awareness of the linguistic and cultural aspects of the TL and their effort to produce a translation that preserves the original expression's communicative function. Linguistically, *image substitution* operates here as a cultural equivalence strategy, replacing the source language's image with a target-language metaphor that has a similar pragmatic effect. Another example of *image substitution* is provided in Example 4 below:

Example 4

حمار ولقى مرعى

Literal translation: *A donkey found a pasture*

It is like a donkey finding a meadow

In this scene, a father talks to his son about his intention to blackmail others, especially relatives. The Arabic simile creates a vivid and culturally specific metaphor. By substituting it with a similar but culturally neutral image in English, the subtitlers preserve the figurative impact but lose some of the cultural specificity embedded in the original. Linguistically, this strategy reflects *cultural adaptation through image substitution*, prioritising target audience comprehension while maintaining metaphorical relevance. This example demonstrates that subtitling requires careful consideration of both linguistic and cultural dimensions to ensure that the intended meaning, emotional tone, and cultural richness of the source text are effectively conveyed (Chaume, 2012; Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2014).

4.3. Reproducing the SL image in the TL

The use of audiovisual translation (AVT) strategies has gained significant attention in recent years, as it plays a crucial role in ensuring effective communication between different cultures and languages. One strategy employed in AVT is the reproduction of the source language (SL) image in the target language (TL). This strategy is referred to as "image transfer" and involves retaining the effective simile of the SL in the TL, regardless of whether it is entrenched in the TL (Rojo & Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2013). In the classroom, the image transfer strategy was observed in students' translation of a video clip. In example 5, the student translates the term "wheelchair" as the name of a guest who will be visiting them in Yemen, despite not knowing English. The boss supports the inaccurate translation and likens the employees who repeatedly ask about the term to camels, which can be perceived negatively in Arab culture (Al Salem et al., 2022). The use of this effective simile is an example of image transfer, as it involves the same image in both the SL and the TL. While only two participants opted for this strategy, the majority of the students converted the SL image into sense, indicating a preference for other AVT strategies. The use of image transfer in AVT has been studied extensively in the literature. According to Gambier & Van Doorslaer (2010), image transfer can be seen

as a form of "culturemes," cultural units transferred from one language to another. The use of culturemes can facilitate the transfer of cultural references and values from one culture to another. However, the use of image transfer can also pose challenges in AVT. As noted by Laviosa & Davies (2020), the use of image transfer can result in the loss of cultural specificity, as the same image may carry different connotations across cultures. Additionally, the use of image transfer may lead to a lack of creativity and originality in the TL, as the same image is repeatedly used. Thus, image transfer as an AVT strategy was observed in the classroom, where students reproduced the SL image in the TL. While this strategy can facilitate the transfer of cultural references and values, it can also pose challenges regarding cultural specificity and originality in the TL. Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of this strategy in different AVT contexts.

Example 6 presents a challenge for students translating from Arabic to English in a subtitling task. In this scene, a relative of the car owner describes how the car was stolen using a simile: "I found they jumped like the rocket," which is difficult to translate directly. The students' commentary reveals that the Yemeni dialect posed a major obstacle to understanding the intended meaning of the simile and, subsequently, to choosing the corresponding English equivalent, "like a rocket." Instead, most students opted for paraphrasing the meaning based on contextual cues, which did not convey the same image as the Arabic metaphor (Husni & Newman, 2015). The use of colloquial language in Arabic adds another layer of complexity to audiovisual translation, as it carries the cultural and linguistic nuances of the region it represents (Gamal, 2019). The challenge for subtitlers is to capture the "force of meaning" expressed by the dialect, which requires a deep understanding of the cultural context (Husni & Newman, 2015). However, many translators are not trained to deal with colloquial Arabic, as translation education in the Arab world is primarily focused on Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) (Sajjad et al., 2013). This results in an incomplete and misleading portrayal of the specificities of Arabic cultures, which may hinder effective communication in audiovisual translation (see Table 4). In conclusion, translating audiovisual content from colloquial Arabic to English requires a deep understanding of the cultural context and linguistic nuances embedded in the dialect. Subtitlers must be trained to capture the "force of meaning" in colloquial language, which may pose a challenge given the predominant focus on MSA in translation education. Future research in this field may focus on developing effective training methods for subtitlers to deal with the complexities of colloquial Arabic in audiovisual translation.

4.4. *Literal translation*

Literal translation was the least frequently used strategy among the students. In this approach, students chose to preserve the original image in the target language (TL), even when the image was monocultural, that is, specific to Arabic. Only three instances of literal translation were identified in the translations of effective similes, as shown in Table 5. In each case, a student rendered the simile

literally, retaining both its form and content despite cultural differences between the two languages. As a result, the English translations may confuse viewers unfamiliar with the original images' cultural context.

The findings of this study show that students rarely used literal translation to create effective similes, suggesting that they are aware that direct translation of figurative language may not adequately convey meaning across cultures. Instead, students tended to adapt or substitute images to make the similes more comprehensible and relevant to the target audience. This reflects a practical recognition that literal translation risks losing cultural resonance or causing confusion, particularly when the source language image is deeply embedded in a specific cultural context. For instance, in the examples analyzed, students often chose strategies that balanced preserving the original image with adjusting it to suit the linguistic and cultural expectations of English-speaking audiences. This finding highlights that subtitlers do not rely on a fixed method but make nuanced decisions shaped by both cultural sensitivity and the communicative purpose of the simile, confirming that effective subtitling of metaphorical expressions requires both linguistic competence and intercultural awareness. These results align with Al-Adwan and Al-Jabri's (2022) study, which found that Arab subtitlers often use strategies such as image substitution or reduction to make sense and ensure clarity for the target audience. Similarly, Mohammed (2023) observed that subtitlers frequently adapt metaphors to align with the target-language culture, prioritizing audience comprehension over literal fidelity.

Table 4. Examples of Reproducing the SL Image in the TL

No	SL	TL
5	وانت جمل You are a camel	You are as patient as a camel
6	تنبع تقل صاروخ Jump like a rocket	It is as fast as a rocket

Table 5. Examples of rendering the source language (SL) similes literally in the target language (TL), maintaining both form and content

No	SL	TL
7	السيارة عادتظر علينا The car will fly	The car is moving away from us The car is driving in the opposite direction
8	وخلينا نشوف مايعمل القمري هذا Let's see what this lunar man will do	Let's see what this guy will do

The findings of the study shed light on the challenges encountered in translating effective similes in Yemeni Arabic into English. The MA Audiovisual Translation students struggled to capture the cultural and aesthetic value of the

similes, leading to a loss of their emotive and vivid nature. This aligns with the principles of audiovisual translation theory, which emphasize the importance of linguistic and cultural competence in subtitling (Gambier & Pinto, 2018; Cintas & Piñero, 2016).

The study's findings underscore the complexity of subtitling and the necessity of a profound understanding of both the source culture (Yemeni Arabic) and the target culture (English) to effectively convey the cultural nuances embedded in similes. *This underscores the significance of discussing the translation of similes in subtitles*, as similes are not only figurative expressions but also cultural markers that encapsulate shared values, beliefs, and worldviews. The students' difficulty in finding metaphorical equivalents in a foreign language underscores the challenge of preserving the semantic meaning and cultural depth of the Yemeni dialect while ensuring clarity and naturalness in English subtitles.

In relation to previous studies, the results confirm that audiovisual translation is not merely a linguistic transfer but a fundamentally cultural one (Cintas & Piñero, 2016). Subtitling involves navigating cultural references embedded in similes, which can pose significant challenges when translating across languages and cultures (Pedersen, 2007). *The translation of similes in subtitles is thus a crucial area of investigation, because it directly affects how cultural meaning is preserved, adapted, or lost in intercultural communication.*

Furthermore, the findings align with the recognition of the cultural specificity of effective similes (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), emphasizing that translating similes requires careful consideration of the cultural beliefs and values they convey. *This highlights the importance of scholarly attention to subtitling as a site of cultural negotiation, where translators must balance fidelity to the source culture with accessibility for the target audience.* By addressing the challenges in translating similes, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how audiovisual translation functions as a bridge between cultures and why similes deserve particular attention in subtitling research.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of training translation students to handle common Arabic dialects rather than relying solely on Modern Standard Arabic. This finding resonates with the need for translators to have exposure to vernacular Arabic used in TV series and films to better understand cultural nuances and convey them effectively in the target language. In this way, the study's findings emphasize the challenges of effectively translating Yemeni Arabic similes into English, particularly in capturing their cultural and aesthetic value. The findings align with the principles of audiovisual translation theory, underscoring the importance of linguistic and cultural competence in subtitling. They also resonate with previous studies that highlight the cultural specificity of similes and the need to consider cultural differences in translation. The study's insights emphasize the importance of training translation students to handle Arabic dialects and to be exposed to the target culture, thereby enhancing their ability to convey cultural nuances accurately in audiovisual media.

CONCLUSION

The present study examines how ten first-year MA students subtitled affective similes from an Arabic TV series into English as part of the Introduction to Audiovisual Translation course. Focusing on two clips from the popular Yemeni series *Ayni Aynak*, the research analyzes the strategies students employed to translate these similes. Four main approaches were identified: converting the source-language (SL) image into sense, replacing the SL image with a standard target-language (TL) image, reproducing the SL image in the TL, and literal translation.

The findings indicate that a majority of the students (7 out of 10) struggled to convey the vehicle of the Arabic similes in English subtitles. Specifically, most of the similes were reduced to sense, meaning the original SL image was omitted and replaced with an explanation of its intended meaning. This strategy, while clarifying meaning, resulted in the loss of aesthetic and emotive impact embedded in the similes. Only a smaller group of students (3 out of 10) managed to retain or adapt the metaphorical image effectively, either by substituting the SL image with a standard TL image or reproducing the SL image in the TL. These strategies, however, were relatively rare compared to sense reduction, reflecting the difficulties in understanding the Yemeni dialect and finding culturally equivalent metaphors in the target language.

The study underscores key implications for translation pedagogy. Training that explicitly incorporates Arabic dialects, alongside Modern Standard Arabic, is vital for enabling students to handle cultural specificity and nuance when subtitling. Exposure to vernacular Arabic through TV series and films helps students develop sensitivity to cultural cues and make more effective translation decisions. Additionally, building familiarity with target-language cultural conventions helps select suitable equivalents, leading to subtitles that accurately reflect both the original context and character portrayals.

This study is limited by its small sample size and its focus on only two clips from a single series, which may not capture the full diversity of subtitling strategies or challenges in translating Yemeni Arabic similes. Future research could expand the scope by including a broader range of audiovisual texts, involving more participants, and examining other Arabic dialects to yield more generalizable findings.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all research participants for their valuable contributions. My heartfelt thanks go to my supervisors for their continuous guidance and support. This work would not have been possible without their encouragement and dedication.

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