

“The Unjustifiable Practices of Omission in Subtitling the Kuwaiti Tv Series I Have a Script”

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to review and critique Omission practices in translating and subtitling Kuwaiti Tv series and play into English. It explores and criticizes the translators for opting for omission versus employing an existing equivalent and focuses on the reasons for omitting such words and expressions, which are directly related to culture, religion, or colloquial terms. This paper also attempts to obtain accurate, existing equivalents in English to demonstrate those equivalents exist and discuss when it is appropriate or inappropriate for a professional translator to omit certain words or expressions in translating and subtitling efforts depending on various elements where omission is commonly employed otherwise.

Keywords: Audiovisual Translation, Kuwaiti Dialect, Omission, Subtitling, Translation.

Introduction:

Translation is an age-old technique for bridging different languages, a phenomenon that has been further accentuated in recent years due to the advent of the internet and other related technologies. The impact that translation makes on artistic discovery in the modern area cannot be understated. Scholars define translation as the process of transferring written text from one language into another language, however, this is not the complete picture. As Baker (2002:277), states that translation studies are now refer to the academic field focused on the study of translation at large, including literary and non-literary translation, various forms of oral interpreting, as well as dubbing and subtitling. Translation involves understanding what every letter, word, clause, and sentence means in the source text and then finding the equivalents in the target language, therefore, the translator must be fluent in both languages to ensure a seamless transition between languages and preserve the naturalness of the target text with the content and authenticity of the source text in mind.

Modern techniques have augmented traditional translation efforts, as the case with Audiovisual Translation, a new form of translation focusing on dubbing, subtitling, and voice-over. Diaz Cintas (2008) define audiovisual translation as “the translation of products in which elements in other media supplement the verbal dimension”. Regarding subtitling, the most widely recognized subset of audiovisual translation, Gottlieb (1998:15), defines it as the rendering of verbal messages in a different language in filmic media, with the length of one or more lines of typed text presented on the screen in sync with the source verbal message.

Nevertheless, translators consistently struggle when translating Kuwaiti films or TV series into English, which is due in large part to the deference given the cultural, religious, and political dissimilarities between the source text and the target language. Translators have consistently omitted certain information in light of those differences, especially when they suspect no proper English equivalents exist. Consequently, omission or deletion in subtitling has been viewed as mostly unavoidable, albeit unfortunate, and for those reasons, omission, namely what words or phrases are voluntarily omitted, has become an essential aspect of subtitling.

In subtitling, translators do not only endeavor to find the equivalents in the target language, they must also be aware of the target language’s cultural norms to convey the proper meaning and acquire the naturalness of the target text. Omission in subtitling has caused increased trepidation amongst many translators, particularly over the last twenty years, after audiovisual translation became recognized. Although subtitling is the most studied form of audiovisual translation, translators struggle with utilizing omission as a strategy to deliver an impeccable target text in line with persisting cultural normalities.

According to Ivacovoni (2009: para:1), Omission is eliminating a word or words from the original text while translating. This procedure can be the result of the cultural clashes that exist between the source language and the target language. It is in subtitling where omission attains its peak in use, where the translator omits words that do not have equivalents in the target text and that certainly raise the hostility of the source language due to the unfaithfulness of the target language. Dickens, Hervey, and Higgins (2002:23), state that “the most obvious form of translation loss is when something which occurs in the source text is simply omitted from the target text, such omission, occurs fairly frequently in Arabic-English texts”.

1. Objectives of the study

This study addresses the following questions:

- How to deal with Kuwaiti dialects in subtitling culture, religion, and colloquial-oriented terms into English?
- To what extent should the translator employ omission in translating and subtitling dialectal terms?

2. Methodology

The study adopts a **qualitative descriptive**, drawing from thirteen thoroughly extracted examples of Arabic-English subtitles from the Kuwaiti television series *I Have a Script*. These examples serve as the empirical foundation of the analysis, selected specifically for containing instances of omission in subtitled dialogue. Moreover, through close textual and contextual analysis of these thirteen cases, the study investigates the underlying cultural, religious, and colloquial dimensions that are frequently erased or muted in the subtitling process.

3. Data and Discussion

The following table reflects the numerous occurrences of omission in subtitling the Kuwaiti series, *I Have a Script*, as well as the percentage of those occurrences, and whether they were omitted for cultural, religious, or colloquial differences.

Types of Omission	Number of Omitted Words or Expressions	Percentage of Omission
Cultural Level	7	24.1%
Religious Level	10	34.4%
Colloquial Level	9	31%
Simply Omitted	2	6.8%
Total	29	100%

4. Types and causes of omissions

According to Baker (1992. P. 40), Omission can happen to words, expressions, and idioms for enormous reasons. These reasons could be religious, cultural, or even colloquial. The omission of words or expressions occurs due to the length of the translated lines that potentially distract the reader with an overly lengthy explanation. As for an idiom omission, it can be applied if there are no close equivalents in the target text and when the meaning cannot be easily translated into the target text for purely stylistic reasons.

4.1. Omission of cultural terms and expressions

The frequency of deletions occurs regularly when a translator is not part of or familiar with the associated source text's cultural norms (i.e. the Kuwaiti culture in our case). Understanding the source text's culture will decrease the frequency of those deletions. From the examples extracted from *I Have a Script*, it would appear that the unnamed translator is not Kuwaiti (or from the surrounding gulf states) or familiar with the region. Although the translation was not directly attributed to any particular translator by name, it is evident he or she is mostly unaware of Kuwaiti culture because exact or close equivalents could have easily supplanted the employment of omissions in the English. For example, note the following omission:

Example (1)

من أهل الله وعلى نياتها

Translated as:

-She gets what she deserves.

Culturally, (من أهل الله) in Kuwaiti means a person who is kind-hearted but lacking in social graces and respects the law. We can translate (من أهل الله), therefore, as a kind-hearted person. We can substitute the subtitle with the following:

-She is kind-hearted and gets what she deserves.

The translation of (على نياتها) is also misleading, which is an indication the translator does not realize a common English expression, “a diamond in the rough,” exists, therefore, a more suitable translation would be as follows:

-She is kind-hearted as a diamond in the rough.

Another word that is omitted by the unknown translator is a well-known, traditional Kuwaiti food called (العقيلي), which is a cake consisting of mostly flour, eggs, and sugar. The translator wholly omitted it in the following example:

Example (2)

شرايكم بالعقيلي الي سويته

The subtitle is:

-Do you like what I cooked?

The translator is not familiar with the concept that many names and/or words can reflect the source language's culture. Moreover, the above-listed omission was not even necessary. He or she could have transliterated it as *Al-auqaily*, which would have indicated to the viewer that the word denotes a traditional, regional food that reflects the simplicity of how food was created at that time in Kuwait. Another reason the translator should have transliterated it, is that many foreigners are unfamiliar with or learning the Kuwaiti dialect and culture, making it particularly useful to have a more pertinent transliterations rather than omitting it altogether. Conversely, the translator could have chosen a close equivalent in English that is “*pie*” because the term *pie* is made from similar ingredients as *Al-Auqaily* and has a similar meaning and connotation. The subtitle should have been as follows:

-Did you like my hand-made pie?

Or:

-What are your thoughts of the Al-Auqaily that I cooked?

5.2. Omission of religious terms and expressions

Certain words can fool the translator in the process of translation because of their particular cultural or religious connotations. As you may imagine, many religious words and expressions were omitted in the subtitling of the above-listed series. However, the omission of those religious words and expressions tended to reflect colloquial words rather than religious ones because Kuwait is a religiously diverse nation. An example of the deletion of religious expressions is as follows:

Example (3)

تعوذ من إبليس وهدى

The subtitle is:

-calm down.

The translator ignored and completely omitted the expression “Seek refuge in Allah from the cursed Satan”. In Islamic culture, it is believed anger, repulsive ideas, and bad intentions derive from Satan (i.e. the Devil), whereby he proactively influences certain behaviors, thus, the aforementioned expression is particularly imperative to reflect in the subtitle, so that the viewer will better understand one of the core adherents of the Islamic faith, which is an essential aspect of Kuwaiti life. To convey the idea of this expression, he can translate it as “seek refuge in Allah from the cursed Satan” or he could have come up with another phrase altogether with a similar meaning such as “have faith” or “do not let the devil control you” as in the following examples:

-Have faith and calm down!

-Calm down! Do not let the devil control you!

Or we can translate it literally. Since the terms have obvious religious implications, we can use the formal equivalence to convey the literal meaning of the expression. Nida (1964:159), states that the Formal Equivalence is the literal translation, as the structure and the form of the target text should match as closely as possible the structure and the form of the source text, whereas Dynamic Equivalence is much flexible and only requires the rendering of the message correctly by any structure or form. A literal translation can be as follows:

-Seek refuge in Allah from the cursed Satan and calm down.

Another religious phrase, which was omitted by the translator is as follows:

Example (4)

يا ربي سترك، لا حول ولا قوة الا بالله

The subtitle is as follows:

My Lord, help me.

Unfortunately, some words are foreignized in the process of being translated, as is the case in some of our examples. For instance, the word ربي was omitted from the target text and that reflects the unfaithfulness to religious words and expressions by the translator. It is preposterous to call الله as Lord because the viewer may not be Muslim; moreover, when the viewer sees those words, he or she will have a wholly different picture of what they perceive as God in mind, which is why religious texts and words should be formally translated or transliterated wherever possible. Another occurrence of omission happened in the same sentence with (لا حول ولا قوة الا بالله), which means “there is no might nor any power except from Allah” or by simply saying “there is no power but with Allah.” As such, the proper translation (i.e., subtitle) should have been as follows:

- Oh Allah, help me, as there is no power but with you.

Playing with the style of a sentence may be acceptable in some instances, but translators must always be concerned with conveying proper meaning while being ultra-sensitive to religious or cultural norms. Another example of omission was of the well-known religious expression (إن شاء الله) is a general term used by native Arabic speakers when they hope to fulfill their commitment. The equivalent expression in English would be “Allah’s willing” or “if Allah is willing,” but the translator, in our case, has chosen to omit the phrase for no good reason whatsoever. The source text with its subtitled translation is as follows:

Example (5)

إن شاء الله ماكو الا الخير

It will be fine.

5.3. Omission of colloquial terms and expressions

Colloquy refers to the informal speech of a language. Similarly, colloquialisms are often interchangeable with the dialect or the vernacular of a given language, in our case, we are attempting to translate the Kuwaiti dialect into English correctly. There are at least nine different Kuwaiti colloquial. (أخ منك) and (شدعوا عليك) expressions omitted by the translator that reflect the emotions of the speaker as in These words function as an indication of rejection or anger from the person uttering them depending on his or her tone. The first example is as follows:

Example (6)

شدعوا عليك!

“Missing Dialogue”

Ironically, the translator not only omitted the proper phrase, but he or she also chose to write “missing dialogue”, which is alarming because it is a famous expression used by Kuwaitis when they want to express denial, rejection, or astonishment. By stating “missing dialogue”, the translator has given us clear and convincing proof that he or she is not familiar with Kuwaiti colloquial speech. A more appropriate subtitle could have been rendered as “No way!”, “are you kidding me!”, or “you are not serious, are you?” The other example mentioned earlier was deleted altogether, and the translator should have at least come up with a translation that more accurately expressed the incidents onscreen rather than entirely omit the expression altogether. The other example mentioned above (أخ منك), is a famous expression said by Kuwaitis to indicate their disappointment, yet, it was omitted by the translator. It is unfortunate, and once again, it reflects an outright insensitivity to Kuwaiti colloquial speech and Kuwaiti culture. When a Kuwaiti is disappointed with someone, there are numerous options available to the translator to choose from, all of which are more appropriate than omission, namely the following examples:

- Damn you.
- you disappointed me.
- Alas!.

Furthermore, disregarding colloquial speech eliminates the exotic, beautiful Kuwaiti dialect, hence, the translator should not have opted for a zero equivalence over a more dynamic/functional equivalence that was readily available. A similar example to (Example 6) found in the series is as follows:

Example (7)

شدعوا أسوم!، شقاعد تقولين

The subtitle is:

What are you saying!

Apparently, the translator only understood and translated the second part of the sentence and utilized omission for the first part. Deleting a proper noun “أسوم” is acceptable because the viewer has knowledge of the actress’s name given the series’ clearly established plot, but it was unnecessary to omit because it is the only word that accurately mirrors the Kuwaiti dialect. In many cases, finding an equivalent translation from Kuwaiti colloquial speech into English is not only useful to foreigners to understand the Kuwaiti dialect better, but it is also imperative for many native Arabic speakers, such as Moroccans and Algerians who will no doubt comprehend the many similarities and differences between differing dialects. Unlike English, the standard Arabic language is not a native language to speakers, in other words, if you live in Kuwait, you are not raised speaking standard Arabic.

According to Dickens, Hervey, and Higgins (2002:167), “every Arab starts out learning the dialect of the area in which they live”. The authors are inferring a concept known as diglossia wherein two varieties of the same language are used by different speakers in the same region. Consequently, omitting Kuwaiti colloquial speech inevitably leads to negative impressions to certain viewers because some words associated with Kuwaiti colloquial speech have different or even opposite connotations dependent on the viewer. An example taken from the series in the word (العافية) as in the following excerpt:

Example (8)

بالعافية عليك، يلا قوم ادرس

The subtitle is:

-Now it's time to study.

In Moroccan and Algerian dialects, the word '*afiyah*' means *Hell* as in hellfire, thus, omitting it from the subtitle will confuse viewers in that region. There is an equivalent for the term in English called *bon appétit*, which is originally French but was borrowed and has been used by native English speakers for decades, therefore, the subtitle should have been as follows:

- Bon appétit. Now it's time to study!

6. Unavoidable employment of omission

Sometimes, omission/deletion in subtitling is wholly unavoidable for a variety of reasons, many of which we note herein. However, the primary reason for most omissions is due to finding a suitable equivalent in the target language, which is often impossible. Other reasons for omissions include the length of the sentence being translated and the timing of inserting a subtitle while an actor or actress is speaking. Georgakopoulou (2009), noted six types of elements that can be omitted in subtitling, which he called dispensable elements. These language-related elements can be deleted because the viewer can readily understand and retrieve them from the mere utterance of the speaker, examples include the following:

(1)- Repetitions.

Example from the series:

(a)- let's go. إمش. إمش.

(b) Please don't. يوه، يوه، لا.

(2)- Names in appellative constructions.

Example "Bald" as in *Charles the Bald*.

(3)- False starts and ungrammatical constructions.

Examples from the series are the following:

(a)- We just bought it إي تونا شارينها

(b)- why did they go to the police station? أقول، ليش راحو المخفر؟

(4)- Internationally known words, such as: Yes, No, and OK.

(5)- Exclamations, such as: oh, ah, wow.

Example from the series:

Why would you do this? أفا، ليش تسوي جدي؟

(6)- Expressions followed by gestures to denote salutation, politeness, affirmation, negation, surprise, or certain telephonic responses.

7. Conclusion

There are many challenges regarding the field of translation, which must be thoroughly discussed by academics. Translation has played an imperative role in civilizations for many decades and has spawned numerous new areas within itself, including audiovisual translation and others. Translation is a complex science, not only an art form, and it encompasses the transference

of one language to another, as well as the bridging of cultures. From reading this paper, it is clear that translators must be familiar with both the source culture and the target culture in order to provide a more accurate equivalent in the new target language (i.e. the Kuwaiti dialect to English). By examining the translations of the aforementioned series, we were able to conclude the translator is neither a native Kuwaiti speaker nor someone who fully understands Kuwaiti culture either.

As we have discussed, some omission occurrences are unavoidable because Arabic and English derive from two different language families, thus, there are various language-related elements where translators are commonly allowed to omit words or phrases such as repetitions, names in appellative constructions, internationally well-known words or phrases, false starts, ungrammatical constructions, certain exclamations, or when expressions are followed by common visual gestures with known connotations. However, it is clear from this paper that omission strategies in subtitling should be thoroughly taught to evade omission whenever they are clearly unnecessary, especially as it relates to colloquial speech, religious references, and cultural references. Translators must rigorously strive to preserve the naturalness and authenticity of the source text into the target text and should be taught when omission is acceptable or not.

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Appendix

English Translation (Target Text)	Arabic (Source Text)
She gets what she deserves	من أهل الله وعلى نياتها
Do you see those stars?	شفت النجوم اللي تضوي بالسماء؟
NA	أخ منك!
NA	ها شرايكم بجوري؟
I brought this rug a long time ago.	تو شاريها برخص التراب، قبل لا تحفر بيتك
Why would you do this?	أفا ليش تسوي جدي؟ ترا اللي فينا مكفينا
Do you like what I cooked?	شرايكم بالعقلي اللي سوبته
NA	شدعوا عليك!
NA	يا بعد جبدي

Drive slowly please	بالعدل، مابي تخرب ليلتي
Now, it's time to study	بالعافية عليك، يلله قوم أدرس الحين
NA	قزرتها
What are you saying?	شدعوا، شقاعد تقولين؟
NA	يا ربي لا تجنني
NA	لاعت جبدي
NA	يوم وعدى
Don't say that!	ما يجوز تقول هذا الكلام، ترا كما تدين ندان
Why did they go to the police station?	أقول، هم شيسوون راحوا المخفر؟
It'll be fine	إن شاء الله ماكو إلا كل خير
Calm down	تعوذ من ابليس وهدى
My Lord help me	لا حول ولا قوة إلا بالله، يا رب سترك
I was selfish	الذنب ذنبي، أنا كنت وايد أناني

NA	صدق الله العظيم
I'm doing good	أي الحمد لله أموري ماشية
Let's go	أمش، أمش، الله يرصا لي عليك
To stand by you if they disrespected you	قلت أوقف بصفح إذا ظلموج، بس ما شاء الله عليج
Please don't!	يو يو لا
The character represents the denial in our community	هذه الشخصية تمثل الجحود.. الجحود في محيطنا وحوالينا
-Just relax! -Fine.	بيبه قول لا إله إلا الله! لا إله إلا الله!

"الممارسات غير المبررة للحذف في ترجمة المسلسل الكويتي "لدي نص"

فهد العجمي – الكويت

الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى مراجعة ونقد ممارسات الحذف في ترجمة ودبلجة المسلسلات والمسرحيات الكويتية إلى اللغة الإنجليزية. حيث تستكشف الدراسة قرارات المترجمين الذين يلجأون إلى الحذف بدلاً من استخدام مكافئات لغوية قائمة، وتنتقد هذه الخيارات، مع التركيز على الأسباب التي تدفعهم إلى حذف كلمات وتعابير ترتبط ارتباطاً مباشراً بالثقافة أو الدين أو باللهجة العامية.

كما تسعى الورقة إلى اقتراح مكافئات دقيقة موجودة في اللغة الإنجليزية لإثبات توفر بدائل مناسبة، ومناقشة الحالات التي يكون فيها من المناسب أو غير المناسب أن يقوم المترجم المحترف بالحذف، وذلك بالاستناد إلى عناصر مختلفة تُستخدم فيها استراتيجيات الحذف بشكل شائع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الترجمة السمعية البصرية، اللهجة الكويتية، الحذف، الترجمة النصية، الترجمة.