

An Analysis of Subtitle Translation of *Mulan*: Skopos Theory-Inspired Perspective

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Abstract

English films, TV series, and audiovisual materials are widespread in the Middle East, and they require subtitle translation to convey the intended meaning and engage the viewer. Subtitle translation can be very challenging, and this is especially the case with cultural-specific items. This study will analyze the Arabic subtitle translation of the film *Mulan 2020*. The study aims to contribute to the literature evaluating subtitle translation in the Arab world. Therefore, the analysis will identify translation violations in light of the Skopos theory at different linguistic levels. To address the issues underpinning the violations in the subtitle translation, the strategies used in translation will also be analyzed. Moreover, using a questionnaire, the study will investigate the audience's perception of the quality of the subtitle translation. The analysis of the data employed a mixed-method design. The findings show that the rules of Skopos theory were sometimes dismissed at the word and phrase levels in the subtitle translation. At the discourse level, the skopos rule was violated. The findings also reveal that the most used strategy was providing a literal translation. As for the audience perception, the findings reveal that the audience rated the Arabic subtitle translation of *Mulan 2020* as fairly good. Overall, the findings suggest that the Skopos theory can be used as a tool to evaluate subtitle translation and help improve the overall translation quality while meeting the audience's expectations.

Keywords: audience perception, *Mulan 2020*, Skopos theory, subtitle translation, translation quality assessment

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Introduction

The widespread popularity of the cinema industry and many other audiovisual materials used for recreation and dissemination of knowledge has resulted in a huge need for Audiovisual Translation (AVT) worldwide. Films and TV series have grown in popularity in the Arab world, particularly among the Saudi audience (Alfelou, 2021). Therefore, subtitle translation is becoming indispensable. Subtitle translation differs from other forms of translation in several ways. Sheng et al. (2019) mentioned some audience-oriented characteristics of subtitle translation, such as the use of basic linguistic structure, colloquial expressions, and short formulation. In subtitling, translators must deliver the intended meaning in the translation, taking the aforementioned characteristics into perspective to engage the audience.

According to Reiss and Vermeer (2014), the purpose of translation revolves around three aspects: the translator's basic purpose, the Target Text's (TT's) communicative purposes, and the purpose achieved using specific translation strategies or methods. The term "purpose" here refers to the communicative purpose of the TT, i.e., the communicative function of the translation in the target culture, considering its social context before deciding on which translation strategies to use.

Nornes (1999) described the impact of subtitle translation on viewers, stating that "every turn of phrase, every punctuation mark, every decision the translator makes holds implications for the viewing experience of foreign spectators" (p. 17). Subtitle translation should help the audience comprehend the material; if the quality is poor, it will fall short of this purpose. Gamal (2014) claimed that the concept of quality of subtitle translation in the Arab world is overlooked, despite the need to systematize it and invest in the training of subtitling specialists. Mounadil (2023) also analyzed the subtitle translation of swear words in *Friends* into Arabic and concluded that most of the subtitles are of low quality. This claim was further supported by Wang (2014), who pointed to the issue of "fansub" translators, who are almost in charge of subtitle translation in the Arab world. Besides being unofficial, their poor translations are still widely circulating.

Several scholars proposed models to improve translation quality and translation quality assessment (Honig, 1997; Lauscher, 2000; Nord, 1991; Toury, 1995). Many theories—such as the Functional Theory, Skopos Theory, and Relevance Theory—can be referred to when analyzing subtitle translation as a framework to assess the overall quality of the translation. However, using Skopos theory to assess subtitle translation has not received enough attention (Chen & Luo, 2022), albeit one of the practical rather than theoretical approaches to translation (Nord, 2005). Nord (2012) postulate that Skopos theory, which was first put forward by Vermeer, views translation not just as an act of linguistic transfer, but also as an application of purpose. Therefore, this theory can be feasibly used to analyze AVTs from various genres.

The first objective of the study aims to contribute to the existing literature that evaluates subtitle translation in the Arab world to improve the overall quality of Arabic subtitle translation (Abdelaal, 2019; Abdelaal & Al Sarhani, 2021; Al-Yasin & Rabab'ah, 2019; Hussain & Khuddro, 2016). Therefore, this study will address the issues underpinning the translation violations in the subtitle translation of *Mulan 2020* from a Skopos theory-inspired perspective at various linguistic levels (word, phrase, structure, and discourse levels). The study will also discuss the strategies used in the analysis to better understand the impact of the violations and offer possible alternative translations. Finally, the study will explore the Saudi audience's perceptions of the subtitle translation of the film.

The second objective of the study is motivated by the current poor state of the Arabic AVT (Gamal, 2019), and the lack of research in subtitle translation conducted from a Skopos theory perspective. Most research on the application of Skopos theory was conducted by analyzing Chinese subtitle translation (see, e.g., Liangqiu & Donghui, 2018; Sheng et al., 2019). It is hoped that the findings of this study will take a step forward in this area.

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. In light of Skopos theory, what are the translation violations in *Mulan 2020* at the word, phrase, structure, and discourse levels?
2. What strategies are used to translate the subtitle of *Mulan 2020* into Arabic?
3. What is the perception of the Saudi audience on the quality of the subtitle translation of *Mulan 2020*?

The first section provides a brief introduction to the research followed by the literature review covering an overview of Skopos theory and subtitle translation, as well as the application of Skopos theory in subtitle translation. The third section presents the methods and introduces *Mulan 2020*. The subsequent sections present the findings (qualitative and quantitative) followed by the analysis, discussion, and finally the conclusion and recommendations.

Literature Review

Skopos Theory

Vermeer (1978) introduced the Skopos theory as a target-oriented approach (as cited in Vermeer, 1998). He stated that it mainly focuses on contextual factors, such as the culture of the TT, the purpose of the TT, as well as the target addressee. When the focus revolves around the skopos/purpose of the translation, the aim will shift from what has been translated to how it was translated, i.e., a process-oriented approach focusing on the strategies and procedures employed to produce the translation.

Vermeer (1998) proposed that the Skopos theory has three basic rules: skopos, coherence, and fidelity. Nord (1997) stated that the *skopos* rule is the most important. Vermeer defined this rule arguing that each text has a purpose to serve. It simply means a text should be translated to deliver an adequate and equivalent function/purpose in the TT. Nord (1997) also believe that this rule was put forward as a reaction to the notion of “free” translation as opposed to “faithful”. According to Vermeer (1998), it is illogical to translate a Source Text (ST) faithfully if it makes the TT difficult to understand. He added that the translation should convey the message rather than copying the original. However, he also emphasized that prioritizing the target skopos does not imply translating freely without replicating the original message and features; a balance is always required. The second rule is *coherence* which Vermeer (2021) linked with intra-textual coherence. The translation must be understandable and appropriate to the cultural and social situation of the Target Audience (TA). The third rule is *fidelity*, which Vermeer (1998) referred to as the intertextual coherence between the ST and the TT since translation is an act of sending and receiving information. According to Nord (1997), this rule was presented to avoid complete disregard for the ST and the original writer’s intentions. The three rules are ranked in a hierarchical order of importance.

Subtitle Translation

AVT research did not receive sufficient attention until recent years. According to Díaz-Cintas and Szarkowska (2020), despite the presence of AVT as a professional activity since the early 20th century, research in this field lagged behind compared to other genres, such as written and oral translation. Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2014) defined subtitle translation as “a translation practice that consists of presenting a written text, generally on the lower part of the screen ... as well as the discursive elements that appear in the image and the information that is contained on the soundtrack” (p. 8). Díaz-Cintas (2013) outlined the constraints of this type of translation, which include spatial, temporal, and linguistic factors.

One factor that affects subtitle translation is the style of the language (i.e., the formality level). Trudgill (2000) noted that stylistic variation occurs on a sliding scale of formality. The most obvious distinction between styles is illustrated using certain words. Furthermore, the differences between existing Arabic vernaculars are marked due to diglossia (the status in which two language varieties co-exist within a community of speakers, as in Arabic). In addition, sociolects have features that can convey important speaker-related information, and such information cannot be disregarded.

Application of Skopos Theory in Subtitle Translation

According to Liangqiu and Donghui (2018), Skopos theory was the most appropriate for analyzing subtitle translation due to its prime focus on the translation function. They identified the strategies and procedures to convey the source function while considering the acceptance and comprehension of the TA. They examined the application of Skopos theory on *Youth*, a Chinese film translated into English. They postulate that many films infused with Chinese culture are amenable to applying Skopos theory to analyze subtitle translation, adding that abiding by the rules of Skopos theory was effective for the subtitle translation to meet the expectations of the TA and deliver the source plot accurately.

Along the same lines, Sheng et al. (2019) outlined the characteristics and limitations of AVT to help develop guidelines for more precise subtitle translation. They used Skopos theory as a framework to analyze the Chinese comedy series *Hello Mr. Billionaire* through the lens of the three rules—skopos, coherence, and fidelity. They analyzed different types of cultural references, with a particular emphasis on proverbs, idioms, and slang expressions. They aimed to identify the strategies that could play a significant role in subtitle translation and analyzed how strategies were used. They found that skopos and fidelity rules were observed when a literal translation was avoided, and that the coherence rule was fulfilled when the TT was acceptable and coherent to the receiver. The most used strategies they identified were paraphrasing and reduction (delet

Chen and Wang (2019) examined the strategies used to render the culture-specific references in *Friends* from a Skopos theory perspective. Their findings showed that the skopos and coherence rules were met in some of the provided examples, such as transferring the hidden emotion underlying the phrase “rip the band-aid off” but failed in other instances, such as conveying the meaning of the gesture “crossed fingers”. As a result, they concluded that adding some explanation and avoiding literal translation are appropriate methods for translating culturally loaded words. Paraphrasing and adaptation are also appropriate for the acceptability of the TA. However, the small sample size casts doubt on the findings and their generalizability.

Gong (2020) critically analyzed the violations of the strategies in the subtitle translation of *Why Women Kill* to assess the translation quality of fansub translators. The analysis was based on violating four strategies: analogy, addition, omission, and adaption. The analysis showed that some ironic expressions, such as the phrase “the Phantom of the Opera” were lost altogether because there were zero alterations of the English cultural images to fit the Chinese culture and audience. Translators also did not use additional strategies to clarify some of the references and thus allow the viewers to understand better. The findings revealed that all strategies were dismissed because the translators opted for a word-for-word or literal translation, consequently making the translation odd and disconnected from the target culture.

Another study by Xia (2020) used the *Pingyao County* trailer, which is loaded with cultural references, as his case study to assess the quality of the subtitle translation in light of Skopos theory. The study focused on various types of culturally loaded terms, including ecological, material, linguistic, social, and religious terms. The analysis revealed that liberal translation, amplification translation, literal translation, transliteration, domestication, foreignization, pragmatic equivalence, and omission strategies were employed to fulfill some of the rules. The overall findings demonstrated that the skopos rule was always followed.

As can be seen, previous studies were mostly from English to Chinese and vice versa. Al-Dahmashi’s (2021) study is one exception. She outlined the underlying cultural challenges that translators encounter while translating audiovisual materials in *Thirteen Reasons Why* from English to Arabic. The study questioned if the strategies used in dealing with various problematic cultural elements were equally effective in achieving skopos/functional adequacy in the TT. Hence, the research concentrated solely on achieving the skopos rule (i.e., the function), dismissing the coherence and fidelity rules. The data were classified into four categories: names and abbreviations, culture-specific terms, slang terms, colloquial expressions, and idiomatic expressions and were analyzed in light of Newmark’s strategies. The researcher concluded that the most frequently used strategies were paraphrasing, providing a functional equivalent, and cultural equivalent, successfully achieving functional adequacy to some extent.

Audiovisual Translation and the Translation Recipient

Nida (1964) was one of the first scholars to emphasize the recipient’s role in translation. According to him, the quality of a translation is determined by whether the target recipient responds to the translated text in the same way that the readers of the ST do. Hence, he considered translation a bridge between the author and the reader. According to Gambier (2009), only a few studies addressed the reception issue in AVT. The development of the functional approach corroborated Nida’s emphasis (Gambier, 2018). According to Skopos theory, the functional and cultural expectations of the target addressee (recipient) are the primary principles to make the subtitle translation acceptable and comprehensible (Vermeer, 1998).

Alkadi (2010) investigated and proposed solutions to the problems translators faced in the subtitle translation of three TV series. He analyzed the cultural items with a particular emphasis on dialects, swear words, and humor. He employed case studies and interviews, as well as questionnaires. He asked the audience to watch and judge the effectiveness of the subtitle translation in conveying the message in the three selected series. According to the findings, the target recipients were unhappy with the translation since it was in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). As a result, social class diversity was lacking in the translation. Also, humor was not translated

accurately since it was translated faithfully toward the ST rather than the spirit of the shows. He concluded that adopting a more functional translation approach can help translators improve subtitle translation quality and similarly affect the TA.

Translation Strategies in Subtitle Translation

The strategies in translation refer to the techniques employed by the translator(s) to solve an issue encountered when translating a word, phrase, or utterance. Researchers, including Baker (2018), Gottlieb (1992), Venuti (1998), Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), and others, have used various terminologies and categorizations with some variations to label strategies. Relevant strategies to the current study are presented below.

(a) Literal Translation

It implies that the ST grammatical constructions are converted to their nearest TT equivalents. The lexical words are translated word for word (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995).

(b) Equivalence Strategy

It means providing an equivalent text in the TT using different stylistic and structural methods (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995).

(c) Paraphrase Strategy

It means changing whole phrases and rewording something written or spoken, i.e., it is an explanation of the meaning (Baker, 2018).

(d) Transliteration

It completely maintains the words in ST, the sound and written form (Nida, 2013).

Methodology

The study employed qualitative and quantitative measures (a mixed method approach) for the analysis. Combining both can triangulate the findings to give a full picture of the subtitle translation and how it was received.

Data

Mulan 2020

The data of this study is based on the film *Mulan 2020*. The ST transcript was extracted from the Disney+ streaming service. As for the Arabic translation used in the subtitle translation, many unofficial Arabic fansubs are available. However, this study used Haroun Studios' official translation, the only available professionally translated version. Both scripts were electronically downloaded. The ST word count was 7,468, and the TT word count was 3,095.

The Plot and Context of Mulan 2020

Mulan 2020 is a Disney animated film that was first released in 1998. It was based on the Chinese folklore story *The Ballad of Mulan*. However, the Disney version is not a faithful adaptation of the Chinese legacy; it was a version for the worldwide audience. According to Tang (2008), the film went through several changes. Wang (2022) argued that *Mulan 2020* portrayed a more feminist version. Therefore, Mulan's surname has been changed to Hua Mulan, which translates to "The Female Mulan". In this version, several adjustments were made to the original plot, including when the commander and Mulan's army comrades learn about her disguise. As a

result, she was abandoned and was about to be killed by her commander because of the Chinese rule that considers women's involvement in the army to be the ultimate shame. Furthermore, the original plot emphasizes that *Mulan* had to overcome a conflict within herself to win the war and save her country and people, demonstrating that a Chinese woman can achieve her goals through perseverance and hard work. In contrast, *Mulan 2020* had an unusual superpower, "chi," to which victory was ascribed, and the production was based on Westernized American feminist ideology. Tian and Xiong (2013) suggest that although *Mulan 2020* is infused with Chinese culture, the film creators were ignorant of the Chinese history and values. The characters do not represent typical Chinese appearance or behavior. Of note, the English script is full of Chinese idioms and moral proverbs literally translated into English.

Procedures for Data Analysis

The researchers first read the transcripts of the ST and TT and identified all the inaccuracies in the translation. Then, the data were categorized into three linguistic levels. For the word level, the focus was on culture-specific expressions and collocations. For the phrase level, the focus was on culture-specific expressions (beyond word level), collocations, and idioms/fixed expressions. As for the discourse level, the focus was on the stylistic devices (mainly formality) and the feminist ideology's infusion. Each item of analysis included the ST with its TT counterpart. The data were analyzed in light of the Skopos theory rules to highlight the violated or successfully fulfilled rules and identify the strategies used in translation. In the analysis, for each item, a brief description of the context, the strategy used, and the violated Skopos theory rules will be presented in the data analysis section. For the quantitative analysis, charts and percentages showing the most violated rules of the Skopos theory and the most used strategies will be presented. The aim is to indicate whether the violated rules affected the overall comprehension and acceptance of the TA.

Audience Perception Questionnaire

The researchers checked the Saudi audience's perceptions of the quality of the subtitle translation. A total of 18 Saudi female students between the age of 24 and 34 majoring in English language and sub-fields at King Saud University in the academic year 2021/2022 were recruited. First, the participants were given general information about the study. Then, they were instructed to watch *Mulan 2020* to evaluate the overall quality of the translation. The questionnaire included examples of the ST and their translation in the TT. More specifically, the analysis items (identified above) were included. This aimed at gauging the audience's perceptions of the quality of the subtitle translation. They rated the items on a scale from one to five (1 = very inadequate translation and 5 = very adequate translation). The results of the questionnaire will be presented in the quantitative analysis section below.

Qualitative Analysis of Subtitle Translation of *Mulan 2020*

In the data analysis, culture-specific expressions, idioms and fixed expressions, collocations, formality, and feminist ideology infusion will be discussed at the specified linguistic levels. Below, tables will show the ST, TT, strategies used, violations, and suggested translations. Under each table, a short context will be provided to guide the reader in understanding the example. Thirty-two instances of inaccuracies in translations were identified at various linguistic levels.

However, due to space restrictions, selected examples representing each category will be presented.

Culture-Specific Expressions

Transferring cultural expressions from one language to another is difficult (Banikalef & Naser, 2019; Kostopoulou, 2015; Newmark, 1987). Therefore, Reiss and Vermeer (2014) noted that translators must use an appropriate strategy to convey the intended meaning and make the translation acceptable to the TA while remaining faithful to the ST. The tables below will illustrate and discuss examples of this category at various linguistic levels.

Table 1. *Naïve Mulan- example at the phrase level*

ST	TT	Strategy	Violated rules	Suggested translation
unaware of the blade	غير مدرك للشفرة الحادة	Literal translation	skopos and coherence	لم تدرك خطورة السيف بعد

The phrase “unaware of the blade” describes young Mulan as she plays with a wooden sword in the field. It refers to how Mulan is still young and does not fully comprehend the danger of the blade she is using. Theebom and De Knop (1997) reported that blade fighting is one of the Chinese wushu styles (martial arts). Hence, the purpose and meaning were obscured because of the literal translation. The word “شفرة” has a different connotation in Arabic (it activates shaving blades). There is also a grammatical error related to the use of the gender marker in Arabic (- يدرك- تدرك) when referring to Mulan, which confuses the TA. These inaccuracies led to violating the skopos and coherence rules.

Table 2. *Mulan’s life force energy- example at the word level*

ST	TT	Strategy	Violated rules	Suggested translation
Chi	الطاقة الحيوية	Equivalence strategy	skopos, coherence, and fidelity	التشي (الطاقة الكامنة)

The word “Chi” appeared 11 times in the film, which could pose a real barrier to comprehending the film in case of mistranslation. This term has its roots in Chinese culture (Chun, 2013). It is important in Chinese martial arts, as it refers to the energy in the body responsible for the strength of all movements. It refers to spiritual energy. However, using the equivalence strategy did not reflect the meaning or purpose. It also failed to make the TT acceptable to the audience. Moreover, the translation was unfaithful to the intended meaning of the ST. Consequently, the translation violated the three rules.

Table 3. *Sanctuary place- example at the word level*

ST	TT	Strategy	Violated rules	Suggested translation
our shrine	مقامنا	Equivalence strategy	skopos, coherence, and fidelity	ضريحنا

In their shrine, Mulan’s father talks to Mulan about the phoenix and how it is linked to their ancestors. In Chinese culture, it is a sanctuary place. The word “مقامنا” has a clear religious

connotation for the Arab audience, particularly Muslims (مقام إبراهيم). Therefore, using the equivalence strategy rendered the TT unacceptable to the TA. It also did not convey the intended meaning, violating the three rules.

Table 4. *Villain’s emperor- example at the word level*

ST	TT	Strategy	Violated rules	Suggested translation
Bori khan	بوري خان	Transliteration	skopos and coherence	الإمبراطور بوري

The word “Khan” appeared 12 times in the film; when mistranslated, it can cause a serious issue in understanding the plot. It refers to a position, not a name, as many may think. It can be traced back to ancient Chinese culture. It is the equivalent of an emperor. The transliteration strategy, therefore, resulted in a loss of meaning in the TT. The use of “خان” neither helped the TA understand nor expressed the intended meaning accurately. Subsequently, the skopos and coherence rules were violated.

Idioms and Fixed Expressions

Idioms and fixed expressions are difficult to translate, especially when the two languages and cultures are linguistically distant (Adelnia & Dastjerdi, 2011). In this film, idioms and fixed expressions were expressed in English and borrowed from the Chinese culture, making finding an Arabic equivalent more challenging. Thus, translators must sometimes elaborate or explain the intended meaning to render the skopos. Stylistically, idioms and figures of speech are colorful languages, and they are used for their aesthetic aspect. It is usually better to translate them with an equivalent expression to maintain the stylistic effect (Baker, 2018). The tables below will illustrate and discuss examples of this category at various linguistic levels.

Table 5. *Young Mulan- example at the phrase level*

ST	TT	Strategy	Violated rules	Suggested translation
A young shoot, all green	كبر عم صغير، أخضر بالكامل	Literal translation	skopos coherence, and fidelity	كبر عم صغير لم يشب عوده الأخضر

This figurative expression describes young Mulan as a girl who lacks experience. Using the literal translation resulted in a total loss of the intended meaning in the TT. The phrase “أخضر بالكامل” actually contrasts the intended meaning since it implies that she is fully grown and ripe. This neither helped the TA understand the meaning nor express it accurately. Further, it lacks acceptability in the TT and has no connection to the ST. Failing to translate the skopos led to violating the three rules altogether.

Table 6. *Partner’s beauty- example at the phrase level*

ST	TT	Strategy	Violated rules	Suggested translation
Her fingers like the tender white roots of a green onion.	أصابعها كالجزور البيضاء الطرية لبصلة خضراء	Literal translation	skopos and coherence	أصابعها بيضاء رقيقة

Cricket, one of the soldiers, is describing his fiancée’s skin, fingers, and eyes. As he describes her fingers, he compares their tenderness to “the tender white roots of a green onion”. This phrase is

an idiom used because the character is portrayed as a “foodie” who usually expresses his feelings through food. However, literal translation fell short of descriptively conveying the intended meaning. Further, it failed to make the translation understandable in the TT. Ultimately, prioritizing the fidelity rule violated both the skopos and coherence rules.

Table 7. *Ideal woman- example at the phrase level*

ST	TT	Strategy	Violated rules	Suggested translation
With strong, wide hips.	بوركين قويين عريضين	Literal translation	skopos and coherence	ممشوق القوام

One of the soldiers is describing his ideal woman. According to him, she must have a slim waist and wide hips. Therefore, literal translation explained the physical image as if it was a medical situation, and it failed to express the function and intended meaning. The phrase “بوركين قويين عريضين” hindered the audience’s ability to visualize the beauty of the body shape and did the opposite instead. Accordingly, the translation violated the skopos and coherence rules, resulting in an unacceptable and insufficient representation of the ST.

Table 8. *Encouragement speech- example at the phrase level*

ST	TT	Strategy	Violated rules	Suggested translation
Four ounces can move 1,000 pounds	يمكن ل١١٥ غراما أن تحرك ٤٥٥ كلغ	Literal translation	skopos, coherence, and fidelity	البعوضة تدمي مقلة الأسد

Before they fight the Rourans, the commander makes an encouraging statement. He encourages his army by saying that the Rourans, despite being a vast, ruthless, and unpredictable enemy, can be defeated. The idiom “four ounces can move a thousand pounds” is borrowed from the Chinese (Gao, 2015). It simply means a small force can still accomplish great things. However, the literal translation focused on the number and the measurement rather than the intended function violating all the rules. The translation also did not render the rhetorical effect that the character (the commander) wished to imprint onto the soldiers.

Collocations

Baker (2018) stated that collocations directly reflect the cultural context in which they occur. As a result, what is culturally accepted in one language may be deemed strange in another (Dweik, 2000). In this case, the translator(s) appear to have insufficient knowledge of both languages to choose an appropriate equivalent to render the function/purpose and make the translation acceptable to the TA. The tables below present collocation issues at various linguistic levels.

Table 9. *Chancellor news- example at the phrase level*

ST	TT	Strategy	Violated rules	Suggested translation
All trade has been disrupted	وجرت مقاطعة جميع الأعمال التجارية	Paraphrase strategy	skopos and coherence	تعطلت جميع الأعمال التجارية

The Chancellor informs the Emperor about the current state of the kingdom. There have been numerous attacks affecting all trade. He is concerned that the domestic and border trades will be

permanently disrupted due to these attacks. Paraphrasing resulted in a partial loss of meaning in the TT. The term “مقاطعة” implies that it was purely “economic” i.e., to stop all trades for a political or religious reason, which was not the case here. Furthermore, the tone and facial expressions of the chancellor (in the scene) are at odds with this translation, making it unacceptable to the TA. As a result, the meaning and function were not adequately transferred. The skopos and coherence rules were thus violated.

Table 10. *Do not eat- example at the phrase level*

ST	TT	Strategy	Violated rules	Suggested translation
a-ruin your makeup	ستفسدين تبرجك	Literal translation	skopos and coherence	ستز بلين مكياجك
b-destroy this makeup	تتلف هذا التبرج			إزالة هذا المكياج

Mulan’s mother tells her not to eat because it would ruin her makeup. She sarcastically responds that even a snowstorm could not ruin such makeup. However, literal translation resulted in some functional and meaning mismatches. For example, the lexical item “تبرجك” has a different connotation (mainly negative) compared to “مكياج” which was the intended meaning but was incorrectly expressed. Also, “تتلف” and “تفسد” do not sound correct, nor do they collocate well with “مكياج”. The skopos and coherence rules were thus violated.

Table 11. *A good wife- example at the word level*

ST	TT	Strategy	Violated rules	Suggested translation
She must be ... invisible.	عليها أن تكون ... غير مرئية	Literal translation	skopos and coherence	عليها أن تخدمه بصمت دون أن يلاحظها

The matchmaker tells Mulan and her sister that a good wife must have qualities such as serving her husband quietly. Unfortunately, the literal translation failed to render the intended meaning and function. Furthermore, the phrase “غير مرئية” refers to microscopic entities that cannot be seen with the naked eye. As a result, it falls short of making the translation acceptable, violating the skopos and coherence rules.

Table 12. *The emperor invitation- example at the phrase level*

ST	TT	Strategy	Violated rules	Suggested translation
to take your place	لتحتلي مكانتك	Paraphrase strategy	skopos and coherence	لتتولي منصبك

When the war ended, and the Rourans were defeated, everyone was proud and grateful, as they owed their lives to Mulan. The Emperor invited her to join forces with the greatest warriors to express gratitude. Unfortunately, paraphrasing caused a partial loss in the TT because one of the negative meanings of “تحتلي” is taking something by force. Therefore, the translation is not entirely acceptable, and the skopos and the coherence rules were not fulfilled.

Structural Level

The importance of correct grammar in subtitle translation has always been debated (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2014). Díaz-Cintas (2013) stated that the language used in subtitle translation

should be grammatically correct. He argued that if grammatical errors must occur, they are typically communicated through lexical choice. He also posit that subtitle translation should use simple syntactic structures to avoid distracting the TA. Consequently, the use of incorrect grammatical structures is frequently regarded as distracting.

The subtitle translation of *Mulan 2020* relied heavily on literal translation without considering the language system, leading to violating the coherence rule and, in some cases, the skopos rule. There were numerous grammatical mistakes in the translation, such as “ماذا حصل حين” and “سقطت عن السطح” and “الطاقة غير المحدودة للحياة بذاتها حيويتها”. These two examples illustrate how poor the translation was due to literal translation and loyalty to the ST system. Furthermore, there were two gender marker errors, one shown in Table 1 and the other at the end of the film, when Mulan is referred to with a male marker “وأصبح الجندي قائدًا” even though the film is dominated by feminist ideology, which aims to depict women as heroes. These errors, which impacted the intended meaning and the ideology, caused violations of the skopos and coherence rules.

In summary, the previous examples focused primarily on the word, phrase, and structural issues. However, there were notable consistent violations of the skopos rule at the discourse level, which required some attention. The following sections display issues at the discourse level: formality and feminist ideology infusion.

Formality

Translators encounter two issues related to the style of the language. According to Dickins et al. (2002), the first issue arises when translating into a more formal language than the original. This is particularly an issue with diglossic languages. The translation can be inadequate if the formality is not rendered at the same level. The second issue is failing to have the same stylistic effect on the TA. Newmark (1987) stated that although a translation may be possible, it may not have the same impact on the TA due to the mismatch in formality. For example, *Mulan 2020* showcased different social classes, which were signaled using formal and informal language. This representation was not rendered in the TT because the translation mostly used MSA. For example, when one of Mulan’s army companions tells her, “You reek, soldier,” the translation was “رائحتك رائحة الجندي”. The word “reek” here is multidimensional and very loaded. It is deliberately used to indicate that the soldier is young (age factor) and from a village (social factor); hence, it is a stylistic element that requires attention to the language style used by people from rural areas. The translation completely ignored informality, which obscured understanding of the scene.

Feminist Ideology Infusion

The film explicitly and implicitly conveys feminist ideology rooted in Western culture, which was adequately rendered in some examples and inadequately in others. For instance, when Mulan’s mother talks to her father about her boyish behavior, she says, “Mulan is a daughter, not a son; a daughter brings honor through marriage”. It was translated as “مولان ابنة وليست ابناً، والفتاة” and “تشرّفنا من خلال الزواج”. Meanwhile, some examples showed a failure in rendering such an ideology. For example, “The girl became a soldier. The soldier became a leader. And the leader became a legend,” which was translated as “أصبحت الفتاة جنديًا وأصبح الجندي قائدًا وأصبح القائد أسطورة”. The Arabic translation contradicts the film’s ideology since Mulan is referred to as a man (a woman cannot be a hero, leader, or legend). Hence, the skopos rule was achieved in some examples and violated in others.

Quantitative Analysis

Following the qualitative analysis, the figures below elaborate more on the violated rules and the strategies used. Figure 1 shows that the translator(s) did not consider the cultural differences between the two languages and tried to bridge the gap to make the translation acceptable and comprehensible. Therefore, the intended function and meaning are achieved to some extent, indicating that the overall translation quality is adequate. In addition, the translator(s) were more faithful and connected to the ST since the fidelity rule was the least violated rule (14%).

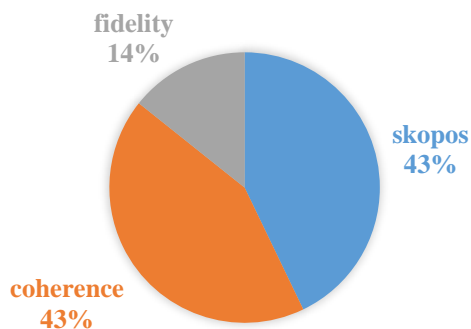


Figure 1. Pie Chart of the Most Violated Rule

Figure 2 illustrates the most frequently used strategies throughout the identified examples. It demonstrates that four strategies were used at different linguistic levels. It also shows that the literal translation was the most commonly used at 58%, which supports the argument that the translator(s) was faithful to the ST.

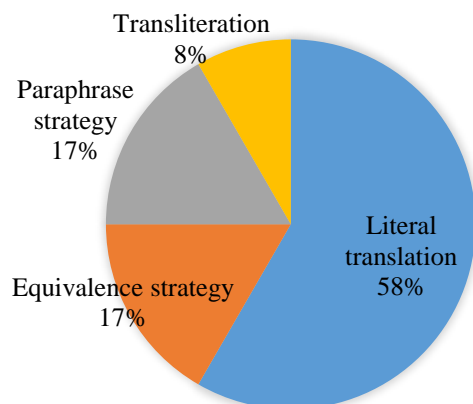


Figure 2. Pie chart of the most used strategies

Audience Perception

As shown in Figure 3, the audience rated the overall translation as neutral (i.e., between adequate and inadequate on the five-point scale). The translations of culture-specific expressions, particularly expression one, were rated as the least adequate and were not fully accepted by many participants. Example four was another problematic expression, yet it was the most accepted and considered adequate, supporting what is discussed in Table 4. Since “khan” was transliterated, the audience assumed it referred to a name, not a position; hence, it was rated very adequately.

The translation of idioms and fixed expressions was the least problematic category because most examples were considered adequate and understandable. As demonstrated in expressions 11 and 12, some expressions were seen as acceptable. For example, the word “تبرج” was used in both expressions but in different collocations. Expression 10 used “تفسد” and the responses ranged from adequate to very adequate. In contrast, when “تبرج” was collocated with “تتلف” it led to considering the translation poor and awkward. This demonstrated that choosing the incorrect co-occurring word could influence the audience’s comprehension and acceptability rating.

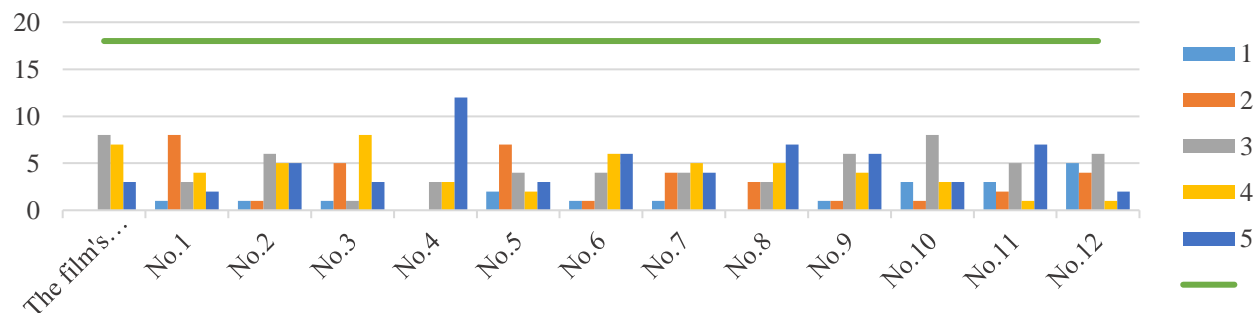


Figure 3. Audience Ratings of Subtitle Translation Quality Across the Items

Discussion

Although the subtitle translation of *Mulan 2020* included several inaccuracies, there were many successfully translated parts. Furthermore, the translator(s) used valid collocations in Arabic such as “أتضورجوعاً” and “خطر داهم” indicating that they were aware of Arabic expressions and when to use them effectively in translation. It can be argued that the subtitle translation quality can generally be considered as acceptable.

The analysis provided answers to the study’s questions. Regarding the rules violated at different linguistic levels, the researchers found that different rules were dismissed in different examples at the word and phrase levels, but there was no pattern for this. However, most translation inaccuracies were identified at the phrase level. As for the structural level, the coherence rule was not fulfilled due to the grammatical inaccuracies. More specifically, the gender marker errors. At the discourse level, the skopos rule was not met due to mismatches in the level of formality between the ST and TT.

In terms of the most used strategies, the translator(s) opted for four strategies in the analyzed excerpts: literal translation, transliteration, equivalence, and paraphrase. The equivalence and paraphrasing strategies also contributed to the oddness of the TT and confused the audience in some cases. The use of transliteration resulted in an incorrect translation which misled the audience sometimes. The findings of the study corroborate previous findings (e.g., Chen & Wang,

2019; Gong, 2020; Liangqiu & Donghui, 2018) regarding some of the strategies that led to violating the intended purpose resulting in an inadequate translation of the cultural references which hindered the audience's comprehension.

The most frequently used strategy was providing literal translation which was the reason for neglecting the intended function and purpose in many instances. Their findings were at odds with the findings of others (e.g., Sheng et al., 2019) which suggested that literal translation should be avoided to achieve the fidelity rule. As has been shown, being faithful and literal to the ST in certain situations can result in a poor, meaningless translation, which prevents the audience from understanding or enjoying the film. There is sometimes a struggle between faithfulness and accurately conveying meaning; translators must be cautious in such situations. Furthermore, the literal translation of the culture-specific items is not the gold standard; in many cases, it will not help the audience to bridge the gap between the two cultures or two languages but may widen it. It will also affect the reading speed of the audience; hence, it will hinder their understanding and somehow disconnect them from the actions in the film.

In relation to the audience perception, the translation was generally rated as neutral by the participants in the questionnaire. The cultural-specific expressions were rated as the least acceptable since they were translated with the objective of being so faithful to maintain the ST form and structure. This was consistent with Alkadi's (2010) findings, as the audience in his research did not accept humor when it was translated literally.

The findings suggest that employing Skopos theory to analyze subtitle translation is feasible. It can help improve the overall translation quality and meet the audience's expectations. Furthermore, knowing the function/purpose of the translation at different linguistic levels can allow the translator to select the appropriate strategy to achieve such a purpose while keeping the audience's perception of the translation in mind to try and maintain their connection with the ST.

Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to evaluate the quality of the Arabic subtitle translation of *Mulan 2020*. The study analyzed the data using qualitative and quantitative methods. The analysis revealed that the three rules of Skopos theory were violated in certain cases, with the fidelity rule being the least violated. Moreover, the translator(s) opted for literal translation, transliteration, equivalence, and paraphrase, with literal translation being the most frequently used strategy and the reason behind many inaccuracies in the subtitle translation. In general, the Saudi audience rated the subtitle translation of *Mulan 2020* as acceptable. The study has several limitations that must be addressed. First, the analysis was limited to expressions at specific linguistic levels identified by the researchers and manually extracted. This manual extraction could vary and the scope of the items included could also affect the findings. The audience perceptions of questionnaire was limited to the Saudi audience, and its findings can only be extrapolated with caution. Moreover, the participants were all female, and the film was infused with feminist ideologies which could also affect the perception of the audience.

Recommendations

It is recommended that translators and commercial companies should use a framework such as Skopos theory. The theory has the potential to be a filter—an assessment tool—to enhance the translation quality as it focuses on the function of the translation and the audience perception. In

addition, training courses on professional AVT should stress avoiding literalism. Such courses should cover the constraints of AVT in general along with providing theoretical information on the applicable theories in the field, as well as practical applications.

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