Audiovisual Translation in the Arab World: A Changing Scene

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ABSTRACT

The digital revolution of the 1990s has changed the way people see and seek information and education. Today in the Arab world, many people resort to screens to get their information, to do their business and to seek entertainment. This paper examines the changing scene where Arabic is being adapted to the digital applications of the new era of multimedia, online sites of major newspapers, satellite channels and DVDs. It highlights the significance of the audiovisual culture in a society characterised by its young population.

KEWORDS: Audiovisual Translation Studies, Subtitling, Media Accessibility

SCREENS ARE EVERYWHERE

T he last decade of the twentieth century witnessed a revolution that has not only challenged traditional sources of information and entertainment, but also changed them for ever. Today, "infotainment" is a concept deeply rooted in the minds of young children and professionals alike. Technological developments in the telecommunication sector lead to the decentralisation of the state-controlled media and the explosion of satellite channels. In 1990 there was only one satellite channel in the Arab world, the MBC. However, that was no match for the powerful CNN, which "invaded" almost every room in every hotel in every capital city in the Arab world. With the second Gulf war (1991), the Arab world tuned in to CNN to see what America was doing in Iraq. By 1996, the situation changed with the launch of Al Jazeera, the Qatar-based news channel that not only challenged CNN, but made the US President George W Bush seriously contemplate "bombing" its headquarters in Qatar during the invasion of Iraq in 2003!

The internet, multimedia and the digital revolution all helped in shaping the media scene for the new century. Screens have replaced the printed page, be it in the form of newspapers, books, magazines, diaries, inserts, letters, or even billboards. Today, screens are visible everywhere: during the Asian Games in Qatar in 2006, at a building site in Abu Dhabi, during the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, onboard the Cairo-Alexandria tourist train, onboard an Emirates flight, at an internet café in Damascus, an ATM in Beirut, on a mobile phone in

Khartoum, during the Carthage film festival and in Yemen where huge public screens measuring 9x6 metres were erected for the public to watch the 2006 World Cup. Today, screens carry information, instructions and entertainment.

Satellite channels have mushroomed to reach 300 Arabic-language channels all competing to win viewers from among 325 million Arabs. With Egypt being the powerhouse of the film industry in the Arab world (Buscombe, 2003), channels turned to Egyptian cinema to fill their broadcasting hours. Television drama production is shared almost equally by Egypt, Syria and the Gulf States. Naturally, the satellite explosion created the need for media production cities to spring up in Cairo, Dubai, and other planned cities in Jordan and Morocco.

THE EMERGING INDUSTRY OF AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION

Cinema came to the Arab world through Egypt as early as 1896, whilst Alexandria had the first purpose-built cinema in 1907. The first Egyptian silent film, *Leila*, was produced in 1927 and the first talkie, *Children of the rich*, was produced in 1932. Other Arab cinemas were developed at different times. Although the Syrian cinema began one year after Egypt, it produced just seven films in its first thirty-five years. Arab actors flocked to Cairo and mastered the Egyptian dialect which was their passport to fame and success. (Hussein, 1995)

Traditionally, subtitling has been the preferred form of audiovisual translation in the Arab world. Malouf explains that the decision was made early in Egypt. Faced with the superior quality of American films, Egyptians feared for the nascent industry and decided against dubbing (Malouf: 2005). In a forthcoming work, I give a detailed history of subtitling in Egypt which began with the traditional *Mefahhimati* (Interpreter), who in addition to explaining the film, acted out the scenes to his captivated audiences. Subtitling however, is attributed to the efforts of Anis Ebaid who began working as a subtitler after his return from Paris in 1944.[1] Although Egypt dubbed its first American film in 1936 (*Mr Deeds goes to town*), the experience was never repeated (Abu Shadi: 2004)

The same story happened with television. Egypt experimented with television as early as 1951, but Iraq was the first Arab country to launch its national television in 1956, and the second in Asia after Japan, followed by Lebanon in 1959. Egypt and Syria launched their television on the same day in 1960. Since then, television "arrived" at varying times in other countries: Kuwait (1962), Saudi Arabia (1965), Tunisia (1966), Jordan (1968), Qatar (1970) and so forth.

The tradition of subtitling foreign television programs had already been established and viewers came to accept the mode of translation, but not necessarily appreciate the skill. Although no formal survey or study of viewer perception of the quality on Arab television is known, public opinion on the quality of subtitling on Arab screens has been made public and accessible to all through the media (Gamal, 2005). Quite often articles, comments, complaints and letters to the editor of Arabic newspapers and magazines deal with

"translation" errors, subtitlers' mistakes, poor linguistic command and most significantly technical complaints such as the font size, the colour of the subtitles and as is expected the erroneous spotting of subtitles. A large collection of these clippings has been examined for an analysis of the nature of viewer perception of the quality of subtitling. Although the method may not be optimal for seeking viewers' opinions, it must be remembered that the BBC on its website admits that global monitoring of its programs is hardly possible and calls on the public to make their opinions heard. The study highlighted the linguistic and technical issues that viewers found irritating in following the Arabic subtitles of foreign programs.

Audiovisual translation had been the domain of a closed circle of "translators" who were taught the skills of the trade, and worked primarily for a limited number of state-controlled channels that had a fixed schedule and limited number of broadcasting hours. This applies to almost all Arab television channels prior to the birth of the Middle East Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) in 1990, and with it the age of satellite broadcasting.

THE NEW AGE OF SATELLITE TELEVISION

With the explosion in satellite channels, the situation dramatically changed. Audiovisual translation which had hitherto meant that foreign programs were essentially subtitled is now being challenged. An exception to this was in the dubbing of cartoons for younger children, whereas older children had their cartoons subtitled. Documentaries were narrated in Arabic, the voice-over was not widely used and there was no teletext on most Arab televisions.

By the late 1990s, the number of satellite channels had reached over one hundred and most were broadcasting non-stop. To fill their broadcasting hours, they had to resort to foreign programs. This sudden need gave audiovisual translation a big boost and made it a promising career. Today there are more than 300 satellite channels that cater for almost every taste and interest. Thematic channels vary from education, to children, finance, sports, religion, news, music and women. The quality of programs has also changed to include reality TV, interactive programs, live coverage, interviews, foreigners speaking in Arabic, live broadcasts from Baghdad, Beirut and Palestine, the World Cup and even the US Congress with Arabic translations: voiced-over, subtitled or simultaneously interpreted.

The need to fill in the broadcasting schedule and the increasing competition for viewership has prompted channels to be more creative. Thematic channels have been created in Arabic, where foreign channels such as the *History Channel, Discovery Channel, National Geographic Channel and Disney Channel* are all being subtitled into Arabic. Even dubbing has become attractive with Mexican and Brazilian soapies making their presence felt in Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt. Other sports programs, reality television, modern TV drama (*ER, Friends, Frasier*, etc.) are shown on Arab satellite channels subtitled into Arabic.

However, this astronomical increase in the number of broadcasting hours and the unprecedented demand for audiovisual translators was not met either by academia or by the profession. To date, in the entire Arab world there are only two academic institutions, one in Cairo (the American University in Cairo) and the other Beirut (The University of Balamand) that offer academic training in audiovisual translation. (Gamal, 2006b)

The market is absorbing a large number of "translators" who work on filmic material armed only with the background of the mono-dimensional, text-based *written* translations. The quality of the dubbing, narration and subtitling show that the translator has very little or no "appreciation" of what happens to their translation after it is completed. No formal study concerning viewers reception and perception to the new modus operandi of reading Arabic on screen were undertaken. Such a study is significant, given not only the increased exposure to language on screen, the wide use of text on many digital appliances from digital cameras, to ATMs and from internet pages to internet forums but also, and most importantly, the effect of the language on the population, the younger population.

GLOBALISATION AND THE YOUNG POPULATION

The Arab world is made up of 22 states and has a population of 323.8 million, which increases by six million every year. Forty per cent of this population is under the age of fifteen. This statistic alone shows why globalisation spells concern in some educational quarters in the Arab world. The open skies policy that descended on the Arab world through the development of improved satellite technology, brought in not only the likes of Disney Channel and Discovery Channel but also unfettered access (through lack of control and censorship) to not only the sex, violence and consumerism of the west, but also the pornography channels.

There are concerns in the Arab world that the young population is simply not ready for globalisation. They are at best consumers of technology, while at worst are burdened with failed development plans, poor educational systems and high unemployment. In 2005, Egyptians spent 17 billion Egyptian pounds on their mobile phone bills and a staggering 15 billion more on private tuition to make up for the free-education they are offered (Al Musawar, 2005).

Another issue is the poor reading level among young Arabs. Masood (2007) cites three main reasons: "financial (books are too expensive), institutional (a desperate lack of libraries in schools as well as in communities), and personal (a lack of time because of commitments to work and families)". However, the increasing exposure to the internet and TV channels are also affecting the way young people see and seek infotainment; a concept that is now taking root as more and more young people carry mobile phones, laptops are connected to the internet and are becoming technology savvy. People watch and read an increasing number of subtitled programs on Arab TV. While this situation may

also be said of young people in Vancouver or in Osaka, there is one difference that sets the Arab situation apart: the Arabic language.

Arabic is a diglossic language and can exhibit two current varieties. While some linguists went as far as describing the two varieties as two separate languages, the fact remains that the two varieties can and are used interchangeably. The poor level of reading in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) among young Arabs is a problem foreseen by linguists, educators and the media for two main reasons.

First, the quality of subtitling on television is poor and appears to follow no guidelines. Individual channels appear to have their own manuals and policies on subtitling. This is compounded by the belief that poor subtitling can have a detrimental effect on the reading level and language quality of younger viewers.

Second, the rapid appearance of foreign websites with Arabic "versions" (CNN, BBC, etc.), the local Arabic "editions" of international magazines and even foreign TV channels broadcasting in Arabic, are all having a bearing on the Arabic language. This mode of "versioning" information and presenting its content in an audiovisual style undoubtedly serves the interests and ideology of those who promote the version.

The nineties also witnessed the rapid production of Arabic versions of PC Magazine (1995), Newsweek (1998), Forbes (2004), Cleo and others. National Geographic launched its version in Arabic aimed at young people, in February 2007, joining its predecessor, Scientific American which had been produced in Kuwait since 1986. While such specialised and educational publications are hailed as worthwhile achievements, the situation becomes different when the United States, in the wake of its invasion and occupation of Iraq, launches an Arabic version of a radio station and a TV channel aimed at young people. The American policy makers did not hide their intention declaring their desire to change the minds of young people in the Arab world about American foreign policy.

Gambier and Gottlieb (2001) speak of a lack of standardisation in the field of audiovisual translation and Orero (2004) shares their opinion. Gambier selects "versioning" as a good example and wonders whether localisation is the same thing as versioning. Within the Arabic dimension, the term "versioning" might have more meaning than first meets the eye. The discourse, the terminology, the link between text and image, the choice of themes and topics, their order in the news bulletin and the amount of coverage given to certain items, all have a direct bearing on the "narrowcasting" of the American message to a special audience. Further, the employment of the Egyptian dialect in these two broadcasting versions is also designed to add depth and breadth to the desired effect.

In addition to the American versions, the Arab world is now being entertained by *France 24,* a French channel "narrowcasting" in Arabic to its supporters, as is *Russia Today* "narrowcasting" its Russian programs in Arabic, and later this year the BBC will launch its refurbished *BBC Arabic TV channel* in a bid to regain market share. The audiovisual scene is changing fast in the Arab world as

more and more channels spring up and more foreign media, education, culture and sports websites exhibit Arabic versions, which all employ not only language but also multimedia to achieve certain results.

A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY OR A CULTURAL INVASION

Throughout history people react to technology with apprehension. Six years after the introduction of television in Egypt, Taha Hussein, the dean of Arabic literature, expressed his concern "that young people do not read enough and watch too much television" (Al Akhbar, 1966) Today, Arab media specialists express the same concern. It is not due to xenophobic fear or gate-keeping desires that they sound the alarm against the mushrooming versioning of websites and the launch of Arabic-language foreign infotainment channels, but rather because of the lack of a national forum where such developments are examined and analysed. In addition to that is the little-understood monster called globalisation, which is colloquially coined "Americanisation" in some quarters of the Arab world. The fact that young Arabs are consumers of western technology and contribute little to the production of such technology gives rise to such concern.

As the world continues to have its borders dissolved by technological advances, from the wheel to the World Wide Web, different cultures and languages will continue to interact. Throughout history, humans have reacted cautiously to the introduction of technological advances: the railway system, the automobile, the ocean liner, television. Man will continue to have such reluctance as the information superhighway, smart phones, electronic government and MTV shape and change the ways we see and seek infotainment. Despite the cultural and political pressures on the Arab and Muslim worlds in the wake of 9/11, the picture is not as dark as some media specialists think or predict. Although slow by international standards, the pace of change within the Arab world is already showing some positive signs in many fields from Casablanca to Qatar. The only difference is that such change is led by a much younger generation that thinks online and speaks a different language that has yet to be examined. To speak of a cultural invasion is to sound too xenophobic, though caution must be exercised as road maps are being introduced to and imposed on the region for which both tend to be negative.

Faced with these challenges the Arab world will continue to interact with different and new cultural patterns. One of these challenges is multimedia. For almost fifteen centuries the Arab world has been at the forefront of cultural exchange through translation (Baker, 1998). It had translation scholars and translation schools and though translation was mono-dimensional and text-based it achieved great feats for all humanity. Today, there is a new challenge: to be aware of the changes, to invest in multi-modal translation and to continue trusting in the dialogue even when the other party "interprets" freedom of

expression, right to self-determination, democracy, international resolutions and treaties "differently".

THE EMERGING NEED FOR RESEARCH IN AVT

Although Anthony Pym (2001) doubts the validity of much of the research in audiovisual translation, the field is steadily gaining a lot of ground. Rather than mere descriptive research that is "producing just one piece of research destined to sit alongside of many others" (2001: 277), the research in AVT, is becoming more relevant to culture and society, gaining voice and certainly more power. On the European continent, conferences not only have regular contributions on AVT, but entire conferences are dedicated to AVT, multimedia and screen translation. Pym's concern about the "subjectless research" of AVT (2001: 279) is slowly being evaporated as the terminology becomes refined and tightened and the European research on AVT begins to include more exotic languages such as Arabic. To date, research on AVT has been a fairly European affair examining linguistic transfer from and into a handful of languages, with English being the common factor. Very few contributions come from Asia and Latin America and none from the Arab world (Gamal: 1996, 2004, 2006a, 2006b). Needless to say, the more diverse the languages are in AVT research, the wider the scope and the richer the debate.

Nedergaard-Larsen (1993: 231) speaks of the importance of keeping "local colour" and to achieve this cultural distance between the two languages must be correctly measured. Since most of the AVT work is from (American) English into Arabic, research must explore the linguistic, cultural and pragmatic differences between the two languages. Whilst it is fairly safe to say that much has been covered in Arabic literature on English-Arabic translation, there is one good reason why this concept should be revisited: audiovisual material has an inherently semiotic nature, which is not addressed in literature on the mono-semiotic printed text of written translation.

Training of translators, as can be gleaned from the agendas and list of papers presented at Arab translation conferences at universities or cultural organisations, attest to the overriding presence of mono-semiotic translations, that is, mostly literary translation. Audiovisual research and multi-semiotic translations such as children literature, advertisements, AVT (subtitling, dubbing, and translation of documentaries) do not usually feature at Arab translation conferences.

AVT in Arabic exhibits the same teething problems its Europeans counterparts are experiencing: terminology, training and technology. While there is no term for subtitling or subtitler in Arabic, the word "film translator, television translation" are being used. In Arabic, Gamal has been promoting the term "visual translation" which is being used increasingly by subtitling companies in Jordan. Like wise, Darwish (2006) suggests "voice translation" instead of *doublage* which has been the common term for dubbing in Arabic. At a more complex level, the terms localisation, versioning, adaptation though translated as

arabization do not convey the technical meaning and function behind the act of translation. However, with more practice and usage, it is inevitable that terminology difficulties will be overcome, as it is always the case with such new concepts.

Training is a more serious matter given the scope of AVT work available in the Arab region. The lack of training opportunities at both the academic and institutional (broadcasting) levels, raises serious concerns about the quality of subtitles both into Arabic (as seen on Arab screens) and from Arabic (as seen on DVDs of Egyptian films and the State-owned satellite channels). There is an acute shortage of research into the quality of subtitling from Arabic, an activity which has increased dramatically in the past ten years for two reasons. First, the launching of "national" satellite channels such as "*Al Masriya*h" (The Egyptian), "*Al Suriya*h" (The Syrian), "*Al Iraqiyah*" (The Iraqi), which are all state-owned satellite channels and therefore have an official role promoting their country. Here the subtitling of major local programs, interviews, films or TV drama assumes a higher ideological importance. Most of the subtitling on the Egyptian and Syrian televisions is done into English, French and Spanish. The other reason is the large-scale commercial production of Egyptian films on DVDs.

Since 2001, Egyptian films have been produced on DVD with only two subtitled languages- English and French. The technical capability of having up to forty languages on a single DVD (Carroll: 2002) has not been used, despite the potential distribution to Iranian, Turkish, Spanish, Indian, Chinese and Russian markets, easily justifying the cost of additional languages. Academic institutions in Amman, Bahrain, Casablanca or Damascus could comfortably cater for translators in these languages, who then could be trained in subtitling. This apparently commercial tendency to confine subtitling to two languages, applies to other films from Saudi Arabia and North Africa as well.

While the number of media companies offering AVT services has increased, particularly in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Dubai, this has not been supported by an increase in training institutions or even opportunities to get into the AVT market. Gamal (2007) observes that AVT in Egypt is an industry without a profession, where the market shapes the quality of and the taste for subtitles.

AVT ISSUES IN THE ARAB WORLD

The AVT scene has changed dramatically in the Arab world. From a single satellite channel in 1990 to 300 channels in 2007, the situation now calls for urgent research into the relationship between text and image (the success story of Al Jazeera), how the Arabic language is being used on screen (use of the colloquial variety, spread of dialects and the use of classical Arabic in documentaries), the way the language of subtitles (*Televese*) affects the reading pattern and linguistic skill of children, and how subtitling of Arab films into European languages and the role they can play in enhancing the dialogue among civilisations. Most importantly however, is how the young population is

engaging information technology and shifting their attention from the traditional print-based sources to on-line and off-line sources. The concept of infotainment is fast becoming the norm and an element of change as more and more digital screens are erected, the growth of digitalised children's games and the fading of past-times such as writing letters, sending postcards and keeping a diary, give way to mobile phones, SMS messages and PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants).

Yet this shift towards digitisation will inevitably have some consequences. Within the Arab society there are a significant number of people in rural and remote areas who are illiterate. Furthermore, digital technology is not available to many, which means there will be a divide between the info-rich and the info-poor. The effective use of audiovisual material, digital libraries and off-line resources could be used to overcome illiteracy which is currently affecting almost 80 million Arabs, or 40 percent of the population.

University translation departments, at least in the more affluent parts of the Arab world (Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States), may consider developing programs in AVT. These programs should be interdisciplinary, in their essence combining courses in information technology, film studies and a specialised area in culture, tourism, history or business. These specialisations are essential as future translators are engaged in DVD authoring working on the translation of promotional material which today is being done on paper. Since the rise of AVT research and conferences in the early nineties, there has been virtually no participation by Arab researchers at international conferences. Academic research into Arabic AVT is scarce and mostly confined to the linguistic aspects of translation, rather than the transfer of linguistic meaning in the multi-semiotic audiovisual context. There are three major hurdles to research in audiovisual translation in Arabic. These are addressed below.

Lack of AVT Manuals

Experience over the past fifteen years has shown that a large number of state-owned and privately-owned television channels are reluctant to show, let alone share their "Subtitler Manual". The same problem exists in the privately-owned media production companies that offer subtitling services. This practice has been systematic in Amman, Beirut, Cairo and Dubai, all of which are considered to be the major centres of AVT work in the Arab world today. Such reluctance can only point to one conclusion: that there are no manuals! And, that subtitling in the Arab world, is an ad hoc practice. This is hardly a new conclusion for many researchers, and practitioners in European countries have made this discovery years ago. (Gambier, 1994; Ivarsson, 1998; Jaskannen, 2001; Sanchez, 2004)

Field visits to private centres in Egypt have revealed the reality of subtitling which, like any business, is profit-driven. At the biggest AVT Company in Egypt (Anis Ebaid), subtitlers work off-line, with pen and paper and from a script. They are paid per subtitle and are considered "translators" not technicians. As a result, they are not responsible for the cueing of their subtitles-in fact most subtitlers do not even see the program they are subtitling. As they

are subtitling into Arabic, their native tongue, the need for an editor is considered unnecessary.

While the pressure of deadlines in the broadcasting and translation industries is notorious, the policy of working off-line and from a script is fundamentally a bad policy that generates an impoverished practice. Such practices also lead to the creation of a language that becomes a genre on its own; *televese.* Examples of using the masculine pronoun when a female is speaking, using an archaic word to sanitize an obscene term without regard to other semiotic channels, or when an abbreviation is mistranslated, bear the hallmarks of a subtitler who did not see the film they created the subtitle for. The training is summed up in the dictum: "Say it in two lines and observe the taboos of dirty language (sex), blasphemy (religion) and sensitive issues (politics)". To be a master of the two lines, subtitlers have to concentrate on the number of words per line but to the detriment of the overall filmic meaning. Without seeing the original, all the semiotic features of the film are lost. Naturally then, there is no need for a manual!

Translators, who carry out subtitling and/or translation for programs to be dubbed or narrated, must watch the program they are translating. The very medium is different from the written or print-based texts particularly as the spoken language of the program is translated into written Arabic which is instantly transformed into the higher variety (MSA) by virtue of being written. Practitioners and researchers and indeed instructors will find that developing a subtitler manual is not only beneficial for practice but also for research as they explore the numerous situations where some of the rules do not fit reality (i.e., the polysemiotic nature of the filmic material). This is contrary to what Pym (2004) believes of AVT researchers compiling mere taxonomies "postulating categories about which little debate would seem called for" (276). Typologies and taxonomies are essential tools of research, which test observations and help in shaping new rules that will be added to a growing body of knowledge.

Translation of Arabic Dialects

The second hurdle is the sudden interest in and importance of Arabic dialects. Prior to the digital age and the mushrooming of Arab satellites, interest in Arabic dialects meant largely an interest in the Egyptian dialect which dominated the Arab scene through music, cinema, the radio as well as the labour force, which existed in almost all Arab cities. Egyptian dialect was absorbed piecemeal at all levels by peasants and presidents alike. Very few universities were interested in Arabic dialectology as Ferguson's "low variety" or the colloquial was shunned by most Arabs who consider MSA to be the one and only variety of Arabic worth examining and studying. Academic interest in the regional varieties of Arabic was confined to the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language. After 9/11, linguistic packages were developed: "Learn Gulf Arabic", "Lebanese Arabic in thirty days" or "Moroccan Arabic without a teacher" and so forth.

It is worth noting that Diglossia is not taught in any Arab university, nor is Arabic dialectology studied. No native speaker of Arabic ever studies the dialect of another Arab country for the purpose of speaking it. Studies were done of course, but for the sake of lexical, syntactic or semantic purposes. Thus Arab students only study and toil over the classical form of their language, or as it is more commonly called MSA (Modern Standard Arabic). They toil because the language is so sophisticated and requires a refined linguistic sense, knowing the genitive, accusative and dative cases when they pronounce their words. The vast geographical area of the Arab world and other historical, cultural and literary factors account for the diglossic nature of the language today. While dialects and regional variations appear within almost all countries, Arabs do not see themselves as having a linguistic problem. MSA with a minimum of effort (low secondary education) could be employed to achieve the desired communicative goal.

As satellite channels are now funding or buying more drama and more programs, they are also participating in more film festivals with their locally produced films in Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Egypt. At film festivals they subtitle their dialects into English and French. In their endeavour to present their culture to the outside world, they subtitle their drama into English, French and Spanish on the "state" satellite channels. Furthermore, three major companies (*Rotana, Fineart Film* and *Finoon*) are now distributing Egyptian films subtitled into two languages; English and French. This trend of subtitling the local dialect into foreign languages is set to increase as more countries produce more films, show more drama and participate at more film festivals.

Traditionally, subtitling was a one-way business in Arab countries as most foreign (American) programs were subtitled into Arabic and later distributed into the many Arab capitals. That situation has changed with the advent of satellite technology and with the digital revolution. Today most Arab state-owned satellites subtitle their programs into English, French and Spanish. In 2006 the government of Saudi Arabia invested in subtitling the rituals of Muslim Haj (pilgrimage) to Mecca and produced audiovisual material in several languages. Screens carried instructions in several languages to guide the two million visitors to the Muslim holy land. The rituals from the Holy Mosque of Mecca were simultaneously subtitled into English in an effort that deserves close attention by academics and professionals alike. It offers an excellent example of how a team of specialists from diverse fields such as information technology, media production, engineering, religion, linguists and translators are able to work seamlessly to produce a highly effective system where by all rituals are simultaneously subtitled into English with little room for error.

However, subtitling drama from different Arab televisions brings subtitlers close to Arabic diglossia and requires a skill not taught at Arab translation schools: translating from the colloquial into English. The subtitling of Egyptian films by Rotana and Fineart Film show a subtitler who is either too keen to reflect the

verbal play of the Egyptian dialogue or a subtitler who was unable to move away from the tyranny of the source text. In either case, the subtitling amounts to no more than "reductive translation" of the dialogue list. What appears to be lacking is that AVT training has not advised subtitlers to approach the dialogue lists of Egyptian films carefully, as their importance is overplayed by script writers (Muharram: 2002), in order to seek meaning within the colloquial structures and not at the surface level. Similarly, they have been *trained* not to watch out for the "eloquence" of the vernacular and to free themselves from its spell. Quite often the subtitling of Omar Sharif films into English show examples of the subtitler falling victim to the brilliant dialogue that they translate and taking the Egyptian structures too literally (Gamal:2006a).

The increased volume of audiovisual translation work today justifies not only a specialised program in AVT but also the development in translation from and into colloquial Arabic. The translation of children's literature and the language used in advertisements are two areas that require special attention by translation trainers. This field is getting even bigger with the application of technology. It remains to be seen what purists will do about the increased use of the colloquial variety of Arabic. Young people do not write in MSA but rather in the local dialect of their regional cities. Any visit to an internet forum will show that young people dominate the internet with a language that is new not only in its lexical items but in its syntactic and graphic structures. This is a rather precarious and delicate situation given the high illiteracy rate, the info-poor within Arab societies and finally the info-rich who do not speak Arabic properly but are increasingly fond of code mixing and code switching into English and French.

Reception Studies

Arab viewers have been watching subtitled cinema for almost 80 years and subtitled programs on television for at least the last forty years. Despite the long history of viewing subtitled programs, few or no attempts were made to measure or to analyse viewer reception of such material. In an unpublished study (2005), I conducted an examination of press clippings on Arabic subtitling over a 25 year period (1980-2005). The collection of media clippings (newspapers, magazines, web sites) include articles on subtitling, dubbing, letters to the editor, complaints to the management of cinema houses, reports from film festivals in Arab countries, Egyptian film weeks abroad, participation of Egyptian films at foreign film festivals and the effect of foreign programs on children.

I concluded that the overall perception of the viewers is negative. This is hardly new, as Nornes (1999) states in his often-quoted paper on subtitling. Most of the criticism levied at subtitlers comes from learned viewers who speak the language of the program. Their grievance is that the subtitles are not true, as there are missing concepts due to the deletion of some words and the order of the words was incorrect. It becomes apparent from the review, that the foreign language "experts" do not understand what subtitling is or under what constraints subtitlers work, and are

ignorant of the intended audience of the subtitles. This group of critics exists in every language and in every culture and the nature of their complaints make a good example in translation classes when function, purpose and context are explained to translation students.

However, the body of negative feedback also shows that the criticism is levied at the language on television, that is to say, the language of the subtitled programs which is read on television, or *televese*. This is defined as: the Arabic language which is the written translation of the spoken foreign (English) of the original program which appears on the screen. *Televese* is characterised by certain lexical items and syntactic structures that tend to appear on television alone and for which Arabic-speakers seldom use or "speak". The language is generally stiff, archaic and sounds unrealistic. It is indeed unrealistic as it is a language that is read, while others are speaking, and because it is written it is phrased in MSA. Yet it is even surreal, as it is a conversational language that is expressed in MSA: something that most Arabic-speakers do not use unless they are public speakers, broadcasters, clerics or Arabists. Furthermore, the rigidity is caused by the process of sanitising obscene language, of condensing and subtitling under pressure, and without the benefit of an Arabic editor. As *televese* has gone unchallenged for forty years, it has continued and developed into a tradition of its own, where new subtitlers promote and adhere to it, as it is the "language of television" they grew up with.

Hajmohammadi (2004) argues that the viewer is "often neglected in subtitling" and explains that the failure to understand viewer requirements, regularly results in a reversed situation whereby viewers resort to the image in order to interpret the subtitles.

In the prevailing audiovisual culture, subtitlers are expected to produce a language that is both legible and readable. Arabic is a very powerful language and quite often the blame is the fault of the user not the language itself. The dichotomy between the high variety and the low variety of Arabic, as Ferguson (1959) put it, will probably go on for ever. Translators and subtitlers will continue to master their language in all its varieties and in as many a dialects or "sociolects" as they can. However, subtitlers can only produce a language that makes sense when they understand the program they are translating; and to do so would actually mean viewing it first!

A FORUM FOR AVT IN ARABIC

The fast changing landscape of telecommunication, broadcasting, demography and literacy in the Arab world requires a forum to raise questions and to discuss issues related to AVT. Despite the total absence of AVT programs at Arab universities and AVT training at broadcasting institutions and translation conferences, it is hoped that the internet will provide a virtual meeting place or a forum for AVT practitioners, specialists and researchers.

Although translation forums already exist on academic and translation websites where audiovisual translation issues (mostly lexical items) are discussed, they are not at the professional depth nor do the queries come from professionals or serious researchers. Similarly, it is remarkable that fansubbing[*] sites in Arabic are on a par with their international counterparts. There are already a large number of Arabic fansubbing sites that boast membership in the thousands. They deal with all sorts of technical gadgetry and digital secrets that the "techno-kids" can solve and *understand* overnight, and speak as if English were their first language. They are primarily interested in getting films subtitled technically and practically, so they are motivated by the technical challenge and not by the linguistic quality. Therefore, they are not afraid to try the unusual, to experiment with different styles and sometimes to use a language that they know would not be tolerated on screen anywhere on the 300 channels in the Arab world today. They are fluent, fluid and flexible - if only were they subtitlers!

Today there are internet forums for almost every interest and specialisation and although the national use of the Internet in the Arab world is still below international levels of 10 percent, there is progress. There is an obvious need for a forum dedicated to Arabic AVT that is concerned with professional and research issues. Some of the pressing issues to be examined are:

1) Why does the language of documentaries tend to be too literary, the narration too poetic and the pace too slow even if the subject matter is technical or historical? Is it because the language transfer was carried out as a *written* translation? Would it have mattered if the AV translator carried out the translation knowing that it is for a documentary narration and not for publication?

2) As there are 300 channels in the Arab world today and they are competing for viewers, there will be some programs that get subtitled twice by different centres in different Arab countries. Will we see different schools of subtitling? At any rate, this should give rise to comparative AVT studies!

3) As Arab society is increasingly becoming media-oriented, will we see a parallel surge in the number of academic institutions offering training in AVT and cultural transfer? Will they be the traditional translation schools, or the media, arts, information technology or dramatic arts institutions? Or will it be an amalgam of all the above offering an interdisciplinary course on Arabic AVT?

4) Will Egyptian DVDs present a section under Special Features that contribute more information about the subtitling of the film with "subtitler's notes" pointing to the issues that were hard to include in the

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[*] Editor's note: Fansubbing (short for fan-subtitling) is the subtitling of a version of a foreign film or foreign television program by a fan into a language other than that of the original. _AD

subtitling but were deemed necessary for a better viewing experience? Subtitler's notes are not a new idea, as it had previously come to the notice of some scholars and researchers (Nornes, 1999; Ramiere, 2006).

5) Given the increasing number of foreign newspapers setting up Arabic versions, and equally a large number of Arabic newspapers and institutions setting up an English version, will "versioning" become a major area of Arabic translation studies or AVT?

6) Adaptation of foreign novels, plays and films has been a thorny issue in Egyptian cinema and theatre for almost a century. Will translation scholars turn to multimedia and AVT to examine the unique link between translation and adaptation?

7) With the young population in mind, will research into *Arabic Televese* help produce a different genre of "modern" standard Arabic that is youthful and viewer-friendly?

8) Will Palestinian cinema, having been bullied out of international recognition, resort to AVT, with all the capabilities that DVD technology can offer, to make up for lost ground?

9) Increasingly subtitlers' names appear in the credits of a large number of subtitled programs in Dubai, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Will this trend continue? Will AVT attract more translators and will they become a household name like Natsuko Toda in Japan?

10) And finally, with the increasing reliance on AVT in the Arab world and with the increasing support for Arab film festivals, will this convince festival management to incorporate AVT, at least as a parallel function, during the film festival activities?

CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that the audio-visual scene is rapidly changing in the Arab world. While Infotainment and the information superhighway mean different things in different cultural contexts, they are nonetheless causing cultures to rethink the long-held traditions of censorship, media control, information sources, language use, and the applications of new technology to suit local needs. This paper is concerned with the new and growing area of audiovisual translation in the Arab world, and although there are only very few signs to guide its growth, it is hoped that the youthful force behind it will push it forward.

AVT in the Arab world can only grow, simply because everything is changing: the population is getting younger, culture is becoming media-oriented and digital technology is increasingly becoming more affordable. The Arab world is faced with numerous challenges and audiovisual translation seems to have more promise as its applications can address many of these cultural, linguistic and epistemic challenges. ✍

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[1] Gamal, M. (forthcoming, a), "Issues in Arabic subtitling". In Thelen, M. & B. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (eds.), Translation and Meaning, Part 7. Proceedings of the Maastricht Session of the 4th International Maastricht-Lodz Duo Colloquium on "Translation and Meaning", Held in Maastricht (The Netherlands), 18-21 May 2005. Maastricht: Zuyd University, Maastricht School of International Communication, Department of Translation and Interpreting.

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Muhammad presented papers on AVT at several international conferences in Bratislava, Melbourne, Amman, Maastricht, Bahrain, Cairo and Osaka. He is a published researcher with interests in the subtitling of Egyptian films, the use of subtitled films in the interpreting class and the relation between the film industry and the translation profession (i.e. film festivals).

He holds academic qualifications from Egypt, Australia and the United States in Arabic, English and Spanish, Egyptology, Translation, Applied Linguistics and is currently completing his doctoral thesis on audiovisual translation at the University of New South Wales in Sydney Australia.

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