

Volume 8, Issue 1, April 2026, p.19-45

Istanbul / Türkiye

Article Information

Article Type: Research Article

This article has been checked for similarity.

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ArticleHistory:

Received
26/09/2025
**Received in
revised form**
15/03/2026
Accepted
30/04/2026



NAVIGATING TABOO: THE ARAB TRANSLATOR'S DILEMMA IN ADAPTING COMICS FOR A WIDER AUDIENCE - A CASE STUDY OF THE ENGLISH VERSION OF "CITY HUNTER"

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Abstract

This paper examines the constraints encountering translators upon attempting to transfer taboo words from the English comics into Arabic by maintaining optimal equivalence. Added to the linguistic challenges confronted when approaching a different genre of texts such as literary, the translator deals with the profoundly cultural-laden material of taboos that translatability becomes an enduring task. With a wide spectrum of strategies to select from, the translator delves into a variety of confounding alternatives in order to cater for the requirements of original text content against fidelity in the target language. In the present research, four translation strategies were selected and evaluated in terms of their suitability regarding guarding meaning in translating English taboo words of comics into Arabic: euphemism, omission, taboo-for-taboo and gawlix. In order to assess their efficiency, these strategies were applied in translating extracted taboo words from the English version of The City Hunter into Arabic. Overall, taking account of religious considerations in the first place, in the Arabic context, with differing degrees of appropriateness among the chosen strategies at issue, euphemism proves as the most useful mode of expressing foreign taboos.

Keywords: Comics, Culture, English-Arabic translation, Taboo words, Translation strategies.

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Introduction

Comic productions we know of or as represented nowadays in media are increasingly incorporated in people's social life all over the globe. Thus, their importance as an integral part of one's regular entertaining media programmes has become common practice. By and large, depending on the cultural communities and the diverse values each culture encompasses, comics can be more or less appreciated as either a promoted or degenerate art. For example, Pilcher and Brooks (2005) argue that in some cultural societies such as Britain and some parts of its respective commonwealth nations, comics are conceived of as a pubescent and immature predilection for enjoyment. On the other hand, they comprise one significant ingredient of the overall art in certain cultures like French and Japanese, while reckoned as drastically engrained within the social aspects of amusement. Because the Japanese culture abounds with comic publication, it has a chief role in their wide spread and translation into many parts of Asia and outside. Translating comic productions can be very demanding, that not only the linguistic distance of two communities render it a rough challenge in the face of the transmitters, but also the content may even be more deterring. It could also be more complex if cultural differences issues come into play. Even worse, the translators shall find themselves forced into a space where they may conceive to have ample manipulation of both the source and target languages, but been tangled within the cultural conflict zone. In this paper, we discuss the topic of translating taboo words in comics from a cultural point of view, and how cultural differences can be a barrier to convey certain terms, which requires of the translator to play the game of substitutions under the terms of endeavouring to keep exacerbation of the original material and not provoking target reader's exasperation

Related Literature

Taboo Words: Overview, Definition and Categorization

The term "comics" remains unsettled owing to the fluidity of the term and a culturally diverse reference welded upon it, some watered down from productions of the entertainment kind. Hence, "comics" are inclusive of various kinds of visual storytelling, ranging from ancient cave paintings

and hieroglyphics to the symbolic arts of medieval times (Zanettin, 2018). Modern comics can be seen as those that arose from the latter years of the 19th century in the USA, distinguished by the use of dialogue balloons to complement the descriptive images (Zanettin, 2014). This work subscribes to the narrower definition of comics as the ninth art (Pilcher and Brooks 2005:12). Hornby (1987) conceived comics as storybooks or magazines using drawings, thus ignoring the fusion of text and images. Eisner (2006) interprets comics as a literary art requiring the collaborative juxtaposition of images and words to illustrate stories or ideas. Eisner (1985) also classifies them as "educational comics," further broken down into technical and attitudinal types. Educational comics are increasingly integrated into society, especially with the recent growth of ICTs. Mass-media consultants would easily recognize the infiltration of instructional content into comic volumes across disciplines, including academia.

Defining Taboo Words

Taboo has culture at its root to such an extent that one cannot conceive culture without taboos, or vice versa (Khoshsaligheh&Ameri, 2014). Taboos arise due to societal disapproval of certain expressions on grounds of religious and moral norms (Yule, 2006), and since "taboo language is offensive," and contrary to politeness; it should be avoided or imprisoned by more acceptable alternatives (Bakhtiar, 2012:9). According to Wardhaugh (2006:239), many things are taboos, while some define them as mere restrictions by society on conduct verbal or physical that causes some degree of anxiety, shame, or embarrassment. While some narrowly define taboo, such as Lindahl (2008), who connects it strictly to swearwords, the issue is wider than just improper speech and action. This implies common types of socially unacceptable behavior being recognized everywhere as taboo.

Semantically, "swearword" or "curse" appear to be synonyms of taboo; in reality, though, the terms are subsets (Karjalainen, 2002), with all swearwords being taboos but not all taboo expressions being swearwords. Topics of taboo include, among others, sex, death, bodily functions, and religion (Wardhaugh, 2006). Strong language may lead to prosecution, fines, or compensation in the Arab-speaking world, where the laws tightly regulate behavior, especially when applied with malice against an individual. This does not mean the words do not exist. For some groups,

such as gangs or drug circles, offensive language is commonplace, and at times they are so far beyond what the West considers offensive that law enforcement may turn a blind eye.

Types of Taboo Words

Jay (1992: 2–9) divides the nine types of taboo terms according to various considerations. Obscene words, including the f word and all its derivatives are vulgar, so much so that their use could lead to legislative sanctions. Profane words are those prohibited for chiefly religious reasons, such as cursing Divine entities or misuse of God's name. Jay equates something similar to profanities: blasphemies and curses, his fifth and sixth kinds; the former insulting holy texts or places like heaven and hell, whereas the latter is a negative reaction that may also not be religious at all. Another category of vulgar language, as enumerated by Jay (1992:3), is impure language, which is not synonymous with obscene language and is often referred to as street language—for example, the Maghreb word "BETTEYA: بْتِيَّة" (barrel) applied to a fat person. Another category is epithets, referring to spontaneous expressions such as shit, damn, or hell uttered in the heat of emotion.

Insult and slur fall closely next to cursing in a category wherein racist or ethnic references are thrown at one through inappropriate words (e.g., negro), stereotypes, or words related to inherited disabilities (e.g., mute, dumb). Slang is the eighth category of taboo words and refers to socially disapproved words used by particular subcultures or social groups (e.g., robbers, party clubs). Examples given in TV crime shows include "puke" (to vomit), "my bad" (my mistake), and "a bomb" (something impressive). The last category includes scatology, so-called for referencing words concerning bodily excretions like sweat, shit, and piss, which are socially stigmatized due to their application in describing human metabolic waste elimination (Jay 1992:9).

Taboo Words and Cultural Differences: A Challenging Issue for the Translator

Williams (2014:11), in the intro to *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, states that when the expression "we just don't speak the same language" is uttered, deeper differences in values or interests are more often being referred to (Williams, 2014). This implies that the languages are truly

incapable of transferring exactly the same meaning because of cultural distinctions embedded within each society. The problem is in fact translation. Newmark (1988) cites culture as the lifestyle of every social group expressed through language; therefore, the translator faces one problem—the cultural gap to be bridged between two languages. The greater the linguistic or cultural distance, the more complicated becomes the translation, even if there exist literal equivalents for the source text. Nida (1964) also strongly states differences in language and culture between SL and TL as very important. Yet, translation of the irregular genres such as 'taboo words' is much more problematic—just what will be briefly explained.

The cultural nature of swearwords makes translating them particularly difficult, as the meaning of the word can be difficult to convey accurately in the target-language context because of its heavy connotative load and the cultures threshold of acceptability. There is an enormous disparity in regard to this acceptability threshold in any culture. Western countries and Eastern countries are vastly different in their acceptability threshold; what could be found casual in either the English speaking group might elicit severe reactions from Arabic communities popped with sarcasm, even among friends. In the Arabic world, some of these words can even be seen as religiously aggressive or even blasphemous, to the point that an individual could find themselves as a defendant in a legal matter, while in a Western context, this language could be completely acceptable and protected under human rights and expressive rights.

Strategies Used in Translating Taboos

It is established in the review above that taboos are the words, expressions and/or behaviours that are culturally improper and offensive, which entail resorting to substitutive means in conveying them. It is also made clear that because such taboos are of various types with differing degrees on the level of derogation, they need be reconsidered by their users in terms of how to communicate them politely. Being in this way, taboos will pose an immediate problem for their delivery into other counterpart culture by means of translation. Indeed, worst even, the translator will fall in between two horns of a dilemma: that retaining the cultural load of the original expression is an intricate challenge per se, let alone if the receiving culture dismisses such expression altogether in some way, and on the other hand that, taking it for granted the expression is acceptably welcomed within the

target culture, the issue becomes that of which procedure to use in order to maintain the content meaningfulness and equivalence without distortion. With such notions in mind, a brief account of a host of the thoughtfully most relevant strategies available to the translator in this regard is due. That will shape the methodological framework according to which practical work is undertaken in the present study. In what follows is the coverage of the strategies that will have been made use of for this purpose, and these are: Euphemism, omission, Taboo word for taboo word, and Grawlix.

Euphemism

It is a method of easing up terms which carry a harsh signification in some way or bear offensive connotations to the hearer, so as to make the receiver feel more relaxed than if used in their original form. In this sense, euphemisms are alternative linguistic forms to avoid embarrassment with the intention of improving the style of communicating a given situation that is socially inconvenient (Leech, 2003). According to Allan and Burridge (1991:14) "Euphemisms are alternatives to dispreferred expressions, and are used to avoid possible loss of face. The dispreferred expression may be taboo, fearsome, distasteful, or for some other reason have too many negative connotations to felicitously execute speaker's communicative intention on a given occasion".

Omission

While euphemism aims to retain content and alter form, omission is used when euphemism fails. The translator resorts to omission to remove parts of taboo expressions during translation (Chesterman, 2017). Some scholars argue that translating taboo words involves two types of omission (Ullman, 1962): first, using shorthand forms like acronyms (e.g., "sh-t" or "shi—" for "shit"), which can be mistaken for similar-looking words; second, deleting highly taboo parts, especially when their omission does not alter the sentence's meaning or cause misinterpretation, as the context remains clear.

Apparently, these two sub-categories of omission are prevalent in the movies we watch where spoken forms are simultaneously accompanied with written versions of this nature. It is equally important to point out that using omission as a strategy is not solely confined with utterances and written strings, but also include image eliminations, due to the fact that in some cultures, for exemplification, wearing bikini or appearing topless in

videos while entertaining in the beach is quite normal, other cultures view this as completely rude, lack of compliance to social ethics and disobedient to rules of discipline. In such instances, the target language will be forced to delete the taboo parts as a whole, be it a picture in comics, a video scene of pornographic implications, or the like. In this sense, omission "refers to deleting parts of the source text, pictures or typographical elements. On the textual level, parts of the dialogue enclosed in speech bubbles may be completely omitted in the TT" (Zitawi, 2008: 144).

However, omissions can sometimes only touch upon parts of a picture than deleting it all at once, by means of covering the unsuitable material in some way, such as making a woman's naked bosom appear blurry. Zitawi (2008) denotes that in the Arabic settings –though with differing degrees, social norms do not permit much freedom in showing what is considered taboo from the women's body for the fact that it is religiously forbidden for an adult female to expose her tempting parts, except hands and face. This is not oppressing women and restricting them from practicing their loose freedom, but rather as protection for them so that men are not allured for sexual harassment.

Taboo-for-Taboo Translation

The third strategy for translating swearwords would be taboo word for taboo words. In fact, talking of different cultures immediately brings the issue of taboos in that western cultures will appear harsher than eastern. It does not follow, nevertheless, that Arabic culture does not include taboos. It does rather have several types of spoken bad language. Although, Muslim communities reject using bad words in that religion totally forbids that, but it is undoubtedly the case that not all people are compliant with the Islamic values, so that one of the aspects where a large number of Muslims do not conform to the religious instructions is the lack of discipline on the usage of some improper utterances. Examples common in Arabic social groups are the taboos "MUMIS مومس" to mean "bitch", "HAQEER حقير" for "motherfucker" more specifically in the Algerian context, among too many others. The point here is that the Arabic culture has the sum of taboos which are, more or less, equivalent to those existent within other cultures likewise. Still, it could be possible that for cultural differences that even across the Arabic communities taboos are markedly with different or have less/more harsh of signification in spite of the fact a taboo is

represented by the same morphemic unit in the target society. With that in mind, on the contrary, a western cultural taboo may have a very close equivalent in the Arabic cultural background, as there may be substitutive options of the taboo-for-taboo translation, no matter if the original meaning is displaced on purpose by not using the exact equivalent counterpart.

Use of Grawlix


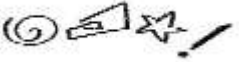

The grawlix, in a broader sense, incorporates an imaginative substitution of profanities and other objectionable parlance with symbols and typographic characters. This is generally recognized as a series of visual symbols used in comic strips and cartoons to make storytelling and visual experience more alluring to the audiences. From the inception of comic strips, comic artists have used the grawlix creatively to censor vulgar or obscene language, to communicate meaning, but without offending the audience (Racicot, 2014).

The term became somewhat popular thanks to American cartoonist Mark Walker, who introduced it in his 1980 book, *The Lexicon of Comicana*, which was a study of the symbols used in cartoons. Walker in this study coined the term *maledicta* to denote the symbolic substitution of vulgar language in comic strips. According to Curb Nottus (2017), Walker (1980) used the term grawlix as early as 1964.

Law (2010) argues that grawlix has gained greater public recognition when compared to other comicana symbols, especially with the widely spread use of the typewriter. With a typewriter that could effortlessly produce such symbols via the shifted-number keys, there came popularity of grawlix among cartoonists. A recent in-depth investigation by Van Elburg (2013), as cited in Lee et al. (2019), expands the notion of the grawlix by adding more types of visual symbols and graphic effects found in cartoons to enhance expression (see Table 1).

Table 1. A list of grawlix examples by Van Elburg (2013)

Types	Examples
Use of glyphs and punctuation marks	?!#\$%&

Obscenicons (a series of negative imaginaries presented in pictogram)	
Scribble lines, shapes and spiral lines	
Visual-textual effects	

Methodology

The practical component of this study centers on the analysis and translation of taboo expressions extracted from selected chapters of the City Hunter Manga series. Specifically, the corpus includes 10 excerpts (scenes) from City Hunter Volume 3, Chapter 10 ("The Waiting Little Girl"), Chapter 11 ("The Barefoot Actress"), Volume 30, Chapter 166 ("The Woman Who Sings a Code"), and Volume 32, Chapter 175 ("The Two Weirdos"). These chapters were chosen due to their rich linguistic and cultural content, particularly in the representation of taboo language and dysphemistic expressions, which pose considerable challenges in interlingual translation.

Here, the instances of the taboo language selected will be translated into Arabic from English in accordance with a number of translation strategies discussed in the theoretical framework of the study. These strategies may include, but are not limited to, euphemism, omission, taboo-for-taboo Translation and Grawlix. Each method will be applied to the source material in order to assess its effectiveness and appropriateness in conveying the intended meaning while maintaining cultural sensitivity and communicative function in the target language.

The main aim of this analysis is to assess the relevance and constraints of each translation strategy when used for linguistically and culturally sensitive material. In each instance, the most appropriate approach will be determined by considering contextual, cultural, and linguistic elements. Rational and objective analysis will offer justifications for the chosen strategy, considering potential audience perception and clarity of interpretation. This assessment method will enable us to reach conclusions

about the practicality and effectiveness of each strategy in translating taboo language in the realm of Manga and intercultural communication.



Figure 1.A scene from: City Hunter Vol.3 Chapter 10 “The Waiting Little Girl”

In this initial example, the strategy of omission is untenable, mainly because that would be a blank in the guise of a sentence, violating its very meaning. Another instance could be cited in using the fourth strategy, where taboo-for-taboo translation could lead to complications, above all if the word is strong enough like `مومس`. Such might be considered inappropriate or even offending for the younger generation. After weighing all other alternatives, only two strategies seem feasible for the translator: the first, euphemism, loses the offensive character of the term by substituting the "Bitch" for something softer such as "مزعجة", thereby preserving the character's irritation but without the offensive tone; the second is the use of Grawlix, a typographical symbol put in place of the offensive term. This option carries the emotional intensity felt by the character, such as anger or frustration, at the expense of semantic clarity and leaves the reader with a general view of anger and not that specific insult.



Figure 2.A scene from: City Hunter Vol.3 Chapter 10 "The Waiting Little Girl"

In the present example; the translator deals with the same word as the previous one. However, its meaning is slightly different from the one elucidated in the aforementioned table. Besides, the translator may use the Grawlix strategy since the character is in an anger state of mind.

Using taboo for taboo word strategy such as اللقيط -Which means literally an illegitimate infant that is used in the Arabic speaking countries to speak about a malicious person- would fit the situation, but, as it is mentioned before the context of comics, it does not go with this type of words, that is why it is preferable instead to use a euphemistic word such as الماكر (Deceitful) which reflects a state of having or showing skill in achieving one's ends by deceit or evasion if there is a choice of not using Grawlix.



Figure 3.A scene from: City Hunter Vol.3 Chapter 11 “The Barefoot Actress”

Here the taboo word carries an obscene meaning with no other interpretation. Hence, the translator has to interpret to transmit the underlying message while at the same time avoiding a direct reproduction of the offensive word, which would be culturally inappropriate and might give rise to feelings of revulsion in the receiving audience.

Even if one were to consider that similar expressions in the Arab culture exist, they would certainly not be used in this context due to social and religious norms of the target readership. Thus, a euphemistic reformulation as follows would probably be appropriate: "جميع ما خمنته سقط في الماء!" (literally: "All that I have guessed fell apart"), which conveys the intended sense without affecting the general meaning of the scene.

On the other hand, omission would be inappropriate here, while it would create an unexplained gap, halting the narrative flow to the detriment of the reader. The Grawlix strategy is useless as well, for the character is not shouting with anger, nor does one find some emotional intensity to justify such an employment of typographic symbols.



Figure 4. A scene from: City Hunter Vol.3 Chapter 11 "The Barefoot Actress"

The example above contains an interjection that is scatological in nature and falls into one of several categories of taboo words mentioned previously in the theoretical framework. In this case, the translator has really only two possible strategies to maintain the intended meaning: euphemism and taboo-for-taboo substitution.

The euphemistic option uses "تبا," usually translated as "Damn," to tone down the expression while still carrying its full emotional charge. Alternatively, a slightly stronger taboo such as "اللعة" could also be used as a harsher equivalent, still tied to the emotional content of the source text. Both words adequately reflect the state of mind of the speaker, which encompasses such feelings as disappointment, frustration, resentment, or mild anger.

Elimination of taboo would, on the other hand, eliminate the very emotional reaction of the speaker and impart expressed force to the dialogue. Similarly, Grawlix lacks the subtlety to render the emotional undertone since the character's reaction is not purely one of anger, and so for those reasons would not be appropriate in this context.



Figure 5.A scene from: City Hunter Vol.3 Chapter 11 “The Barefoot Actress”

As presented in the example "You can't fuck with her!", "fuck" may be categorized as one of the most extreme single words of taboo language, whether applied in a sexual or non-sexual sense. While equivalents exist for such invocations in many Arabic dialects e.g., the Algerian one that stands as a perfect mirror to the English one: *ما تقدرش تلعب معاها*, such expressions are generally avoided in the context of comics for reasons that span cultural propriety and decency.

In some situations, however, the least offensive translation would be realized by obscuring or lessening the obscenity, interpreting the intended meaning. E.g., more acceptable here would be: *لايمكنك العبث معها*, that is, "You can't mess with her". It remains faithful to the original in the sense that it emphasizes that the character is strong or not to be challenged while ridding itself of any obscene implications.

Conversely, other strategies, such as omission, would not only impair meaning but would also leave the reader with an incomplete grasp of the scene. Similarly, the use of Grawlix is inappropriate here, as the emotional tone is not one of explicit anger, and such symbols would not effectively convey the intended message.



Figure 6.A scene from: City Hunter Vol.3 Chapter 11 "The Barefoot Actress"

In the example above ("Son of !"), the author of the source text intentionally withholds the offensive part of the expression by using ellipsis or typographic omission. To preserve this stylistic choice, the translator should mirror the original strategy by also opting for omission. The Arabic equivalent that best reflects this approach would be:

"!أيها"

This maintains the ambiguity and leaves the offensive content implied, just as in the source text.

Alternatively, if the translator chooses to convey the emotional intensity more explicitly while still avoiding direct obscenity, the Grawlix strategy can be used. In this case, an appropriate rendering would be:

"! @#\$%& يا ابن"

This choice communicates the outburst and frustration of the speaker without specifying the taboo term, thus preserving both tone and cultural sensitivity.



Figure 7.A scene from: City Hunter Vol.30 Chapter 166 “The Woman Who Sings a Code”

The explicitness of certain expressions is such that it forces the translator to look for ways to temper their strength and make them acceptable to the target audience. In this case, the original expression leaves little room for the translator to avoid its explicitness.

One option is to translate it literally by a taboo-for-taboo approach, such as:

"!كنت قد أتخيلك تتغوط"

But that translation would be too rough and offensive—particularly to child readers—and thus perhaps not allowable in the genre of children's comics or child content.

A safer alternative would be to employ a euphemistic strategy, translating the sentence to:

"!كنت قد أتخيلك تقضي حاجتك"

This phrase, translatable into English as "I would think that you were relieving yourself," retains the essential meaning of the original but ameliorates its bluntness, rendering it more socially and culturally palatable.



Figure 8.A scene from: City Hunter Vol.32 Chapter 175 "The Two Weirdos"

In the given example, two general translator options are on hand. The first is euphemism, via a generic and socially acceptable translation like:

meaning: ("You touched me") "إلقد لمستني"

Making no explicit reference to the involved body part. The second is a still more direct translation that identifies the groped area, like:

"لمست ظهري!" in Modern Standard Arabic, or "لمست مؤخرتي!" in dialectal Arabic, which both simply convey the idea that the posterior was touched.

Based on the religious and cultural sensibility of Arab audiences, especially in media such as comics where it may be viewed by children or conservative readers, the translator would most likely use the euphemistic form. This maintains the crucial message without offending or being obscene.

On the other hand, employing omission—e.g., "إلقد لمست....." (You touched.....) would be inappropriate because it raises uncertainty that may lead to confusion or misreading. Such a form of ellipsis may initiate improper or undesirable assumptions in the reader's mind regardless of age. Therefore, euphemism is still the best appropriate and culturally sensitive choice here.



Figure 9. A scene from: City Hunter Vol.32 Chapter 175 "The Two Weirdos"

Similar to the previous example, the literal translation of the given phrase — to "have sex with the concerned person" — would probably be insulting or inappropriate to translate directly into Arabic as:

"أريد فقط معاشرتها!"

Even though this is a correct translation in terms of meaning, it may violate cultural and religious norms, especially for audiences of Arab society.

For that, a euphemistic replacement is proposed, such as "أريد فقط أن أكون أول" ("I wish to be her first"), which softens the sentence and shifts focus from a desire for sex to one of emotion. This does not diminish the meaning of the character's statement but avoids adding explicit or culturally sensitive language.

As in the example above, omission is not recommended in this situation — e.g., "أريد فقط....." — « I am seeking only» because the sentence becomes unclear. The obscurity may also lead the reader to read it sexually

and therefore circumvent the intention to remain innocent. Therefore, euphemism is still the most appropriate and best way to go in this situation.



Figure 10. A scene from: City Hunter Vol.32 Chapter 175 "The Two Weirdos"

In the following excerpt, the phrase "My ass!" is an English exclamation that is often rude, disrespectful, and even sarcastic. It notably indicates rejection or disbelief, contempt, fury, mockery or anger. In this setting, the character uses the phrase to vehemently disagree with what was said to her.

To translate Arabic while preserving meaning requires cognitive competence and context-situational understanding through heuristic equivalence, where both emblems attitudes and communicative goals are upheld. One translation would be !كلام فارغ which translates as 'empty words' capturing culturally oriented rejection disbelief.

An expression from the Algerian dialect such as "ما تتمسخرش بيا" addressing deeper emotional layers in angry denial could work perfectly. Still, considering culture etiquette especially prose written for broader audiences like comic books such phrasing despite accuracy will more likely appear vulgar identity unfit the genre.

An alternative approach can be Grawlix because anger embedding illocutionary force comes within statement's context at least partially. The problem with grawlixes goes beyond partial portrayal—they lack sarcasm so cast ambiguity about speaker's intentions drawing audience far from

their purposes lacking precision wrapped within wordplay infused layer emotions.

Thus, a euphemistic or contextually equivalent expression like "كلام فارغ!" is the most suitable option, balancing meaning, tone, and cultural appropriateness.

Summary of the Findings

Euphemism as the Preferred Strategy

Most of the time, euphemism is the most efficient way and the more socially acceptable method for rendering English swear-words into Arabic. It allows the translator to maintain the gist and emotional content of the original work without alienating readers, particularly when the work is in a medium such as comics that children or general audiences would be able to consume.

Limitations of Taboo-for-Taboo Translation

Although Modern Standard Arabic and some other Arabic dialects are known to have a vocabulary of words related to taboo or controversial topics, accurate translations of English taboo words into Arabic are considered to be prone to cultural, religious, and moral restrictions. "مومس", "اللقيط", "ابن حرام", or dialectic words like "مؤخرتي" for instance are still considered as offensive or vulgar and are usually not preferred to be used in translated texts intended for wider audience.

Grawlix: Emotional yet Semantically Null

The Grawlix option can serve as a visual tool for expressing intense emotions in a censored, like when we are angry or frustrated. But it's often quite vague and does not necessarily mean that the exact semantic sense will be retained. It is most effective when the emotion is strong and is unsuitable for nuanced or sarcastic speech.

Omission is Ineffective in Most Cases

This strategy of leaving something out is generally confusing or ambiguous. If a word goes away completely without a replacement that is acceptable in culture, we end up with a loss of meaning, and may prompt unintended interpretations, particularly in sensitive or emotionally charged dialogue.

Dialectal Arabic: Accurate but Inappropriate

As we mentioned before, although dialectal expressions like "ما تتمسخرش" or "تغوط" may capture the raw emotional tone of the original, they are considered too informal, vulgar, or region-specific for standard publication. Their use is generally avoided unless the context explicitly allows for such informality.

Cultural Filtering is Essential

The translator is constantly engaged in cultural filtering, not only the linguistic but also the sociocultural implications of each word or phrase. Arabic cultures even interdict many neutral or light-hearted Western expressions, and a fair amount of thought is required when adapting these to suit them.

Context Determines Strategy

The choice of strategy often depends on the emotional state of the character, the target audience, and the narrative tone. For example, sarcasm, mockery, or light teasing may require euphemism or interpretation, while expressions of rage may permit the use of Grawlix or stronger euphemistic alternatives.

Discussion

The analysis related to the various taboo expressions in English and possible Arabic translations feels complicated and sensitive for many reasons related to the semantics of the expressions as well as the sociocultural values which are inherent in the target language culture.

First, euphemism has proven to be a reliable and commonly adopted strategy. The power of euphemism is in the ability to relay the general emotive meaning - anger, frustration, denial or sarcasm - without engaging the unacceptable terms pertinent to culture. In Arab society religious and moral guidelines restrict language, therefore, euphemism is an effective strategy for referencing taboo language in a respectful way.

Expressions like "Bitch," "Bastard," or "Fuck," were translated successfully into more neutral, or ameliorated, Arabic expressions like "المرأة السيئة", "شخص سيء", or "لايمكنك العبث معها" respectively. These expressions achieve the communicative purpose without infringing cultural norms, thus reiterating the need for the translator to adhere to acceptability over literalism.

Secondly, while literal equivalence—especially with respect to dialectal Arabic—could produce accurate translations in terms of emotional intensity and social function, it was judged to be largely unacceptable in the context of comics. Terms such as "مومس", "ابن حرام", or "تتغوط" are simply too offensive or too anecdotal and would inevitably alienate the audience, who simply would not want to engage in reading such text. Even if such terms exist and can be understood by Arabic speakers, they breach the standards of decency that are expected in content that are designed to be broadly consumed, particularly works that may appeal to children and younger audiences.

This outcome follows what scholars refer to as an issue of linguistic equivalence and pragmatic acceptability, which must see the translator avoid fidelity to source-text profanity and respect the sensitivity of the audience.

Thirdly, the use of Grawlix played some helpful role in scenes of strong emotional outburst, mostly in instances in which the character is angry or frustrated. However, since Grawlix usage is so limited when it comes to nuanced meanings such as sarcasm or disbelief, or when the meaning is simply mockery, it is often avoided in such contexts.

Grawlix is not semantically specific and often creates confusion over what the actual intention of the character is. In summary, Grawlix may function as a form of visual expression, but it is mostly limited to certain environments and contexts with drive by extreme emotion, rather than nuanced verbal communication.

Regarding omission, it was clearly the least effective strategy in all the examples. The removal of a taboo without a compensating mechanism (e.g., euphemism or visual cues) generated ambiguity and gaps in interpretability. There were clear examples of confusion caused by the omission of taboo words, where the reader's confusion resulted in unintended sexual or vulgar implications.

This leaves us with the notion that omission is a last resort option for dialogue strategy in a comic, and should first ascertain that all other strategies in either dialogue or captions would produce more harm to the communicative or cultural narrative of the text, and also readers will misunderstand the narrative under improper circumstances, so omission

must be treated with care, as it is vulnerable to breaking the intellectual flow of a comic narrative.

Concerning the use of Arabic regional dialects as equivalents for English words and expressions, it becomes evident that dialectal expressions enhance emotional plausibility and social authenticity. Phrases such as 'ما' تتسخرش بيا' or 'مؤخرتي' mimicked the tone and vulgarity of the original English expressions. The issue with these terms is that they are regionally located and subject to social stigma, so their use is limited primarily to living contexts and not usable in published or pedagogues material. The result is a tension that conceptually highlights the difficulty of balancing naturalness with decorum. These are situations that compel translators to choose alternatives in Modern Standard Arabic that are more globally acceptable.

However, it is important to consider how these dynamics might shift when moving from formal, published translations to informal media contexts. In unofficial fan translations, online forums, or social media content, translators often operate with fewer restrictions and a different set of audience expectations. In such spaces, the use of regional dialects like Algerian Darija or Egyptian Ammeya may be not only acceptable but actively preferred by niche audiences seeking authenticity and emotional immediacy. Unlike standard publications, which must adhere to formal publishing standards and often use Modern Standard Arabic to reach a pan-Arab readership, informal media can afford to prioritize emotional authenticity and humor over linguistic conservatism. This creates a parallel "cultural conflict zone" where the strategies identified in this study—euphemism, literal equivalence, omission—may be deployed differently depending on the platform and intended audience.

The divergence between standard and informal media also raises important questions about the future of Arabic translation in global entertainment. As streaming platforms and digital distribution blur the lines between formal and informal content, translators may increasingly need to navigate multiple registers of Arabic simultaneously. A single franchise, for instance, might be officially translated into Modern Standard Arabic for broadcast on pan-Arab television, while simultaneously being fan-translated into multiple dialects for online consumption. This layered reality suggests that

the "acceptability threshold" discussed throughout this study is not fixed but varies according to context, audience, and medium.

Future research could usefully compare these two contexts to determine whether the strategies for navigating taboo language shift when official oversight is removed. Comparative studies examining official publications alongside fan translations of the same source material would provide valuable insights into how translators adapt their approaches based on constraints and freedoms inherent to each medium. Such research would further enrich our understanding of the translator's role as a cultural mediator operating at the intersection of language, society, and technology.

Another significant aspect is the role of religion and culture in shaping the translator's decisions, which has proven to be particularly potent in Arab societies. What may have been humorous or common in Western comic art, may have been considered extremely low/bad taste - laughably so - in Arabic. We must be aware of just how far our intercultural competence must reach, and audience expectations especially in children's media or publications intended for the general public.

In a nutshell, the findings highlight the necessity for context-sensitive, culturally sensitive and pragmatically-oriented strategies for translating taboo language. The translator's job is not only to find lexical equivalents, but to mediate between the cultures, address offensiveness, and retain fidelity to the narrative.

Euphemism is typically the best strategy for most situations, while omission and taboo-for-taboo may be permitted for very circumscribed and justified uses. Grawlix can help to mitigate language, and is especially helpful in those instances where visual reinforcement of emotion is acceptable.

Conclusion

Translating taboo words in English into Arabic and their use in comic books, animated series or Manga is certainly challenging. It goes beyond just substitution with an equivalent term in the other language. It is important to strike a balance between conveying the original emotional tone and observing the culture and religion sensitivity of the target language's intended audience. Grawlix can be a useful convention when the

taboo word or euphemized word conveys a strong emotional response—most often that of anger or frustration. It does not reflect the precise semantic content, which the word has, but visually depicts the emotional charge the taboo word has, and is generally acceptable in contexts where an emotional response format is employed. Omission, by contrast, is going to be the least effective approach because it usually creates some loss of meaning, or distorts its usage. The cases in which it is appropriate, are minimal, and can only be identified when the source text itself employs omission (e.g., ellipses, or dashes)--where the translator mirrors the original text stylistically. Otherwise omission, at best, will create an interpretive void, or at worst, promote unintended assumptions in the reader's mind.

Equivalents do exist for taboo expressions, whether in Modern Standard Arabic or dialect forms, but these direct equivalents are generally avoided because of cultural or decency considerations, especially for audiences who are younger or general.

Of all the strategies available, euphemism is probably the best and most effective. Euphemism allows the translator to maintain the basic message and maintain cultural acceptability. Euphemism is very common in Arabic dubbed animated series and translated Manga. Arab readers are used to euphemisms, as this type of translation is acceptable in their communities, which are heavily dominated by Arabic speakers.

Finally, religious and cultural values will be vital in regards to the most appropriate strategy. The translator must always consider their sensitivities, and make decisions that honour their cultural standards and expectations. Translation is about redefining, not just translating language, and this delivers cultural mediation, which is more important than always appropriateness, and respect for audience and clarity is vital.

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