



PATRONAGE AS A KEY INFLUENCER IN THE POLITICAL MANIPULATION OF ARABIC SUBTITLES: THE CASE OF THE AMERICAN MOVIE 'ZERO DARK THIRTY'

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Abstract:

This article aims at discussing the issue of manipulation in subtitling. It sets out to investigate the translation strategies that subtitlers use to manipulate the source text. It seeks to describe how translators 'distort' content to serve political interests and find out the key factors influencing them to be manipulative. The study is based on the work of Andre Lefevere (1987) and (1998) on translation as manipulation and the work of Diaz Cintas (2007) on ideological manipulation in Audiovisual Translation (AVT). The study argues that translators have turned into political agents who serve patronage for political motives.

Keywords: subtitling, manipulation, political, patronage

Resumé :

Cet article vise à aborder la question de la manipulation dans le sous-titrage. Il vise à étudier les stratégies de traduction utilisées par les sous-titreurs pour manipuler le texte source. Il cherche à décrire comment les traducteurs « déforment » le contenu pour servir des intérêts politiques et à découvrir les principaux facteurs qui les incitent à être manipulateurs. L'étude s'appuie sur les travaux d'André Lefevere (1987) et (1998) sur la traduction comme manipulation et sur les travaux de Diaz Cintas (2007) sur la manipulation idéologique en Traduction Audiovisuelle (AVT). L'étude soutient que les traducteurs sont devenus des agents politiques qui servent le patronage pour des motifs politiques.

Mots clé : sous-titrage, manipulation, politique, patronage

1. Introduction

With the advent of technology and the hegemony of social media, some would argue that we have almost reached the stage of global citizenship. People worldwide share the same values and principles, and see the world from the same goggles. Yet, some others would claim that this technological domination has but intensified difference and widened the gap between

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cultures and nations. It has attributed to translators, the linguistic and cultural mediators, a new role: that of idiosyncrasy preserver and peculiarity protector.

Within the framework of this philosophy, manipulation has become inevitable in translation in general and in audiovisual translation in particular. The translator is the shield who should protect the target culture against the deviances and aggressions included in the source text. Accordingly, translators manipulate to maintain, inter alia, moral values, religious beliefs and social security and stability. They may also manipulate a text for political motives, such as preserving the postulations of a constitution, giving legitimacy to a regime or even protecting the interests of a political group or a leader.

In the following study, we shall investigate how the Arabic subtitlers of the American movie 'Zero Dark Thirty' have heavily manipulated the subtitles to serve political ends.

2. Literature review

2.1 Ideology as a concept

The term 'ideology' was first coined by Count Destutt de Tracy in 1796 to designate the new nationalist science of ideas that had prevailed in France at the end of the 18th century following the fall of the monarchy. It is used to "refer to a new rationalist 'science of ideas' that set out the epistemological study of concepts and the workings of the mind." (Munday, 2007). Since then, ideology has developed both in meaning and scope and has taken different turns, sometimes even being divergent.

Eagleton (1991) comes up with a list of definitions of ideology currently in circulation; here are some of them:

- the process of production of meanings, signs and values in social life;
- a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class;
- ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power;
- false ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power;
- systematically distorted communication;
- that which offers a position for a subject;
- forms of thought motivated by social interests;

These definitions confirm the divergence of scholars in providing a description to the term. Generally speaking, we can identify two main conceptions: negative and positive.

2.2 Ideological manipulation

Ideology has taken a negative and narrow class-based conception with Marxism. According to Karl Marx, ideology is related to illusion, distortion and mystification. "Ideology is a form of cognitive distortion, a false or illusory representation of the real" (Gardiner, 1992, p. 60). It is an elusive view of the world used by the ruling class to control the working class. Because the ideology of dominant classes is always the ruling ideology, it is internalized by inferior classes in the form of a 'false consciousness' about their own fate and position in society. In this context, ideology is related to class interests, which serve to maintain political power and manipulation (Bennett *et al.*, 2005). It is thus the core of social struggle resistance undertaken

by the working class against the ruling class. Williams (1983) argues that this negative conception of ideology has affected the way it has been studied.

In contrast, other thinkers and scholars conceive of ideology positively. It is seen as a common system of thought tied to group interests for the sake of individual and collective objectives. It is the basis of the social representations shared by the members of a group. Van Dijk (2006) sees ideology as "*the foundation of the social representations shared by a social group.*" It is the worldview that members of a social group acquire from the surrounding circumstances. It helps people to identify what is right or wrong, good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable.

Simpson's (1993) (cited in Fawcett/Munday, 1998) definition of the term matches this notion of 'worldview'. It states that ideology is "*derivo[ed] from the taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs and value-systems which are shared collectively by social groups . . . [and] mediated [through] powerful political and social institutions like the government, the law and the medical profession.*" In other words, these value systems which are socially shared are used to monitor ideological practices or societal structures.

Yet, though these definitions have emptied ideology of its apparent negative conception, it is still embedded when two value systems are at stake. Van Dijk (1998) argues that ideology nowadays has a generally negative connotation of distortion and manipulation. He states that "*few of 'us' describe our own belief systems or convictions as 'ideologies'. On the contrary, 'Ours' is the Truth, 'Theirs' is the Ideology.*" (2) He proposes a multidisciplinary theory of ideology that includes three elements:

- cognition which refers to the thoughts and beliefs which go together to generate ideas;
- society which refers to group interests, power and dominance;
- discourse which is the language used to express ideologies in society, often involving concealment and manipulation.

This entails that Van Dijk's theory of ideology requires first a cognitive part that is able to properly account for the notion of 'belief system', second a collectivity of social actors to share the belief system and third a discourse context to express these social ideologies.

Van Dijk (2006) argues that ideologies have many cognitive and social functions. They organize and ground the social representations shared by the members of (ideological) groups. They also form "*the ultimate basis of the discourses and other social practices of the members of social groups as group members*". They also enable these members "*to organize and coordinate their (joint) actions and interactions in view of the goals and interests of the group as a whole.*" For example, a racist ideology may direct attitudes about immigration as a feminist ideology may control attitudes about abortion. Another function of ideologies is that "*they function as the part of the socio-cognitive interface between social structures (conditions, etc.) of groups on the one hand, and their discourses and other social practices on the other hand.*"

Van Dijk (2006) concludes that because ideologies are "*the foundation of the social representations shared by a social group*", they can control the personal mental models that underlie the production of ideological discourse. They are not only expressed by discourse; they can also be translated into actions and practices. Throughout written texts and everyday

talks, we may observe the impact of the ideological 'bias' of underlying mental models and social representations based on ideologies.

2.3 Ideological manipulation in translation

Lefevere, one of the most prominent scholars in translation studies, has dedicated a significant amount of effort to exploring the connection between translation and ideology. His understanding of ideology evolved as he developed his own theory of translation. In 1988, he published an article titled "Systems Thinking and Relativism," where he embraced Eagleton's definition of ideology as "*a set of discourses that contend over interests relevant to the maintenance or questioning of power structures central to a whole form of social and historical life.*" This concept of ideology encompasses both political and action-oriented dimensions.

Later on, Lefevere expanded his theories of 'the cultural turn' and 'rewriting,' in which he identifies three key factors influencing the translation process. Initially, professionals such as critics, reviewers, teachers, and translators make decisions about the target text. Additionally, patrons, both individuals and institutions, exert influence on the final product, either facilitating or obstructing the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature. Another crucial element is the dominant poetics, which mediates the relationship between literary techniques and broader social systems. Within this framework, Lefevere defines ideology as "*the conceptual framework comprising opinions and attitudes considered acceptable in a particular society at a specific time, guiding how readers and translators approach texts.*"

Lefevere considers translation as an independent literary product that he describes as 'rewriting' as the source text undergoes a series of changes that are governed by the translator's ideology.

"All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewriting can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain, and in an age of ever-increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulation processes of literature is exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live." (Bassnett/ Lefevere, 2004: vii)

Accordingly, all translations are reflections of the target languages' ideologies. They influence literature to serve specific societal functions. They are forms of manipulation utilized to uphold power dynamics but can contribute positively to the development of literature and society. Translation can purposefully be used to distort meaning, and the study of translation is primarily concerned with depicting and analyzing these distortions.

2.4 Manipulative strategies in translation

Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007) provide a detailed set of strategies that can be used for the purpose of rewriting. These strategies are based on Díaz Cintas (2003) and Santamaria Guinot (2001). We shall apply them to help us analyze how culture-bound words are ideologically manipulated, given that taboo words are a good representation of this category of words. Díaz Cintas and Remael's strategies are a valid tool for analysis due to the absence of encumbering subdivisions and the presence of well-defined clarifications.

These strategies are comprehensive as they include a broader scope of contexts and cases. Here they are:

- 1) **Loan:** the word or phrase of the ST is borrowed by the TT and left unaltered, for example: food (muffin), drinks (cognac), places (San Francisco), historical events (perestroika)...
- 2) **Calque:** it is a literal translation of a CB terms, especially when an exact equivalent in the TL is not available, for example: the Spanish title *Secretario de Estado* is a calque translation of Secretary of State, while *Ministro de Asuntos Exteriores* (Minister of Foreign Affairs)] would be more appropriate.
- 3) **Explicitation:** the translator tries to make the text more accessible by meeting the target audience halfway, either through specification by using a hyponym (tulip for flower) or through generalization by using a hypernym (Belgian quality paper for Le Soir)
- 4) **Substitution:** a term is substituted with another one which is deviated from the source one because of technical constraints. A long reference that could be translated literally may be substituted by a shorter one to gain space and save reading time (stew for Goulash).
- 5) **Transposition:** the cultural concept is replaced by another cultural concept belonging to another culture (the Dutch HEMA for The British Marks & Spencer).
- 6) **Lexicalrecreation:** it is the creation of a neologism, which may be inevitable if in the ST there is a made-up word as well. (the Spanish neologism *rarezametro* [oddity-meter] for the English 'weird shit-o-meter')
- 7) **Compensation:** it is compensating a loss somewhere in the translation of an exchange by over-translating or adding something in another. It is "popular strategy in subtitling even though it may not always be practical due to the oral-visual cohabitation of the source and target languages" (Diaz Cintas and Remael, 2007: 206).
- 8) **Omission:** though it is not an appropriate strategy, but it is sometimes unavoidable either because of space-time constraints or because there is no corresponding term in the TL.
- 9) **Addition:** it occurs when CBT might cause comprehension problems. (candidat Palantine for Palantine).

3. The case study

Before we analyze the corpus, we need to include two introductory sections in which we shall provide a political background to demonstrate our claim as well as a presentation of the movie

subject of our study. We need also to specify that the movie from which the corpus has been collected was broadcasted on MBC channels, which is an entertainment TV group owned by the Saudi government, but directed to the entire Arab world.

3.1 Political background

Subtitlers may resort to manipulative practices in translating the soundtrack for political purposes. Arabic subtitles are glaring examples of this manipulation. One can justify that by the abnormality of Arab politics. Indeed, the political situation in the Arab world is one of the most complicated situations in the world. This intricate situation dates back to the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the conclusion of the Sykes-Picot Agreement by virtue of which the Arab world has been divided into small state countries. These countries are governed mainly by non-democratic ruling systems and are often in conflict with each other. Most of them are also in a state of conflict with Israel, which has seized the Palestinian territory and driven its population to seek asylum in the neighboring countries. During the last half of the twentieth century, political instability was fueled by the Cold War, Pan-Arabism and Political Islamism.

At the dawn of the third millennium, Islamic extremism has proven to be another factor of instability in the Arab world, creating anarchy within Arab countries and poisoning their relationship with the rest of the world, especially the Occident. The introduction of the concept of Jihad in the political life of the Islamic world in general and in the Arab world in particular has had a devastating effect on these worlds.

"Jihad is now often used as a conventional shorthand not only for the Islamic revival in the Middle East (considered a "jihadist backlash"), but also for the alleged threat this represents to Western democracies in Islam's quest for world hegemony ("global jihad")." (Political Islam in the Middle East, Are Knudsen, 2003)

The turmoil in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Algeria and many other countries is the bitter repercussion of Islamic extremism and global jihad. Internationally speaking, the 9/11 attacks on the USA were committed by one of the most notorious Islamic groups: Al Qaeda.

3.2 The movie *Zero Dark Thirty* as a true story

In the movie '*Zero Dark Thirty*', there are many situations in which the subtitler manipulates the audience. To better understand the motives for manipulation, we shall provide a historical background which can elucidate the situation. The movie '*Zero Dark Thirty*' is a fiction which exposes real events with real names. It traces the CIA investigation subsequent to the 9/11 attacks on the American soil. The attacks were perpetrated by the Al Qaeda group, which was led then by its founder Usama Bin Laden, a Saudi citizen. The director claims in an interview cited in the British Telegraph of June 23, 2020, that '*Zero Dark Thirty*' is "*accurate in the way a movie can be accurate: it's 10 years compressed into two and a half hours, and there are many, many tactics utilized.*"

After the attacks, indications seem to point to Saudi Arabia's involvement. First, the attacks were claimed by Al Qaeda and its head, Bin Laden. Second, there is the striking fact

that 15 of the 19 hijackers of the planes used in the bombing were Saudis. FBI investigations have been carried out to examine the link between Saudi officials and the attacks.

According to New York Times Magazine:

"The full story of the F.B.I.'s investigation into Saudi links to the 9/11 attacks has remained largely untold. Even the code name of the case — Operation Encore — has never been published before. This account is based on interviews with more than 50 current and former investigators, intelligence officials and witnesses in the case. It also draws on some previously secret documents as well as on the voluminous public files of the bipartisan 9/11 Commission. The Encore investigation exposed a bitter rift within the bureau over the Saudi connection... Richard Lambert, who led the F.B.I.'s initial 9/11 investigation in San Diego, as the assistant special agent in charge there, says he believes that even if the F.B.I.'s evidence of possible Saudi involvement in the case is not conclusive, it is significant enough that it should be fully disclosed. "The circumstantial evidence has mounted," he says. "Given the lapse of time, I don't know any reason why the truth should be kept from the American people."" (NY Time, 01/23/2020)

In 2016, The Congress enacted the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA), which allows the families of the victims of the 9/11 attacks to proceed in a lawsuit against Saudi Arabia to pay for the damage.

3.3 Manipulation in 'Zero Dark Thirty' subtitles

The above facts can be a solid justification why the translator has to be very cautious while translating a movie which, according to the director is *"accurate in the way a movie can be accurate"*. It also gives a good reason for the heavy use of manipulative strategies.

Let's consider the following scenes. In these scenes, the translator is in front of situations where the word 'Saudi' is used exhaustively. The term has been used thirteen times throughout the movie and the translator has to make it vanish from the sight of the audience. So how can it be possible? The subtitler has opted for two basic strategies of manipulation: substitution and omission.

Situation: Daniel, the FBI investigator, is interrogating Ammar, a terrorist suspect
Daniel: Come on, man, I'm fucking with you. No, I don't want to talk about 9/11 yet. What I want to focus on is the Saudi group. That, there, is Hazem al-Kashmiri. And I know this dude is up to some serious shit. What I want from you is his Saudi e-mail Ammar,
هيا يا رجل، أنا أمر جمعك. لا، لأريد أن أتحدث عن 11 سبتمبر بعد، ما أريد التركيز عليها هو الجماعة المسلحة. هذا هو حازم الكاشميري. دنيا وأنا أعلم أن هذا الرجل قائم على عمل كبير. ما أريد منك بريدها لا جنبيعمار.
Daniel: Come on, man, I'm kidding you. No, I don't want to talk about 9/11 yet. What I want to focus on is the armed group. That, there, is Hazem al-Khanshiri. And I know this dude is up to some serious shit. What I want from you is his foreign e-mail Ammar,

In the sequence above the word Saudi is used twice. However, the subtitler uses two different terms to translate it. In the first case, Saudi turns into **المسلحة** which means armed, while in the

second case, Saudi becomes **الاجنبي** which means foreign. Surprisingly enough, the term Saudi is originally an Arabic word which was calqued in English keeping even the same morphological structure of the adjective in Arabic. The subtitler is using the strategy of substitution for a word which is initially Arabic. This is done in an attempt to remove any reference to Saudi Arabia in the events of the movie and subsequently in the events of the 9/11 attacks in the mind of the audience. The translator applies the same strategy many times. Here are some of them.

Situation: Daniel interrogating Ammar.
Daniel: I want the e-mails of the rest of the Saudi group. Give me one e-mail and I will stop this Ammar. Who's in the Saudi group? And what's the target?
من في المجموعة المسلحة وما هو الهدف؟ أريد البريد الإلكتروني ونيليا قياي المجموعة الأجنبية أعطني بريد الإلكتروني ونيوا واحد وسأوقف هذا أعمار: دانيال
Daniel: I want the e-mails of the rest of the foreign group. Give me one e-mail and I will stop this Ammar. Who's in the armed group? And what's the target?

The Saudi becomes again **المسلحة** and **الأجنبية** as in the previous case. In this scene, even the soundtrack is turned down at the pronunciation of the manipulated word.

Situation: Daniel is talking with his chief Joseph Bradley about Ammar
Joseph: And what's his issue? Daniel: He's being a dick. Joseph: Well, if he's trying to outsmart you, why don't you tell him about your PhD? Daniel: Yeah. No, but I am gonna have to turn up the heat on this asshole. He needs to give up the Saudi group now.
جوزيف: وما مشكلته؟ دانيال: إنه عنيد. جوزيف: حسناً، إذا كان يريد التفوق عليك، فلماذا لا تخبره عن مؤهلاتك؟ دانيال: أجل. لا، لكنني سأقوم بالضغطة على هذا الأحمق. يحتاج للتخلي عن المجموعة الأجنبية الآن.

Situation: FBI agents Daniel and Maya are talking to Ammar who is eating his breakfast.
Daniel: I'm glad you said that. Okay, uh, I got an e-mail from you to him, with all your comms for years, bro. Who, um... Who else is in your Saudi group? Ammar: I just handed out some cash for them. I didn't know who the guys were. Daniel: When you lie to me, I hurt you. Ammar: Please.
دانيال: أنا سعيد لأنك قلت ذلك، حسناً، لقد تلقيت بريدًا إلكترونيًا منكم، مع كل اتصالاتكم منذ سنوات، يا أخي، من، ... من أيضاً في مجموعتنا الأجنبية؟ لقدوز عتبعضاً النقود عليهم، ولما كنا عرفنا من هم الرجال. أعمار دانيال: عندما تكذب علي، أؤذيك. عمار: أرجوك.

Even when the word is not pronounced in the soundtrack, but written as a caption, it is subject to manipulation. Before the first visual scene in the movie, we can clearly read the caption: The Saudi group. The subtitle is **المجموعة المسلحة**. And this goes on for all the other recurrences of the term 'Saudi'. In another context, a different strategy is used. Let's consider the following situation:

Situation: Daniel, Maya and Jessica are talking after the Khobar attacks.
Jessica: Don't worry about the Saudis . They will take care about the business
Daniel: Uh! Yeah.
Jessica: You warned them. They didn't take you seriously
لا تقلق بشأنهم. سيهتمون بأمركم: جسيكا دانيال: اه. اجل جسيكا: لقد حذرتهم ولم يأخذوكم جدياً
Jessica: Don't worry about them . They will take care about the business
Daniel: Uh! Yeah.
Jessica: You warned them. They didn't take you seriously

The term Saudis is replaced by an object pronoun هم /them which does not have any reference. It is used as a manipulative technique to avoid using the expression السلطات السعودية which is a definite translation of the Saudis. Even in this scene, where the term Saudi is not negatively involved, the action is the same. The subtitler opts for the technique of substitution. In the same way, in another scene, the word Saudis refers to Saudi Intelligence, yet it has been substituted.

Situation: an FBI agent brings Maya a video claiming the death of Abu Ahmed
Agent: I, um, didn't think this day could get any worse, But, uh...bad news from Saudi intelligence. The, um...courier guy, Abu Ahmed, is dead. It's a detainee video.
لما كنا اعتقد ان هذا اليوم يمكننا ان نزيد ادسوءاً، لكناه ... أخبار سيئة من المخابرات الاجنبية. مات الرجل الساعيا أبو أحمد. إنه فيديو للمعتقل. العميل
Agent: I, um, didn't think this day could get any worse, But, uh...bad news from foreign intelligence. The, um...courier guy, Abu Ahmed, is dead. It's a detainee video.

In other cases, the translator favors omission to solve the problem. Instead of trying to find a manipulative counterpart for the term Saudi like المسلحة/الأجنبية the word is deleted at once. Let's consider this instance:

Situation: American officials arguing about the identity of the mysterious man in the house.
Deputy national security advisor: According to them, this behavior could belong to someone other than al-Qaeda. They did give a 40 percent chance that the unidentified third man...is a senior al-Qaeda operative. But they also said there's a 35 percent chance he's a Saudi drug dealer. A 15 percent he's a Kuwaiti arms smuggler.
نائب مستشار الأمن القومي: حسب قولهم، هذا السلوك يمكن أن يخص شخصاً آخر غير التنظيم المسلح، وقد أفادوا بنسبة 40٪ بأن الرجل الثالث مجهول الهوية ... هو أحد كبار أعضاء التنظيم المسلح. لكنهم قالوا أيضاً إنها كفرصة 35٪ فيكونها تاجر مخدرات . 15٪ هو مهتر بأسلحة.
Deputy national security advisor: According to them, this behavior could belong to someone other than the armed organization. They did give a 40 percent chance that the unidentified third man...is a senior armed organization operative. But they also said there's a 35 percent chance he's a drug dealer. A 15 percent he's a Kuwaiti arms smuggler.

Though the contest in the sentence is far from being political (drug dealer), the word is omitted. This means that there is a manipulative decision to remove any mention of the term from the movie. The only exception is noticed in the translation of a caption in the scene

depicting the attacks on Khobar Towers on May 29th, 2004. Just before the attacks, we can read the caption:

Khobar – Saudi Arabia
الخبر المملكة العربية السعودية

So, how come that, in this situation, the subtitler does not apply the same strategies used previously by either substitution or omission? The viewer can read for a period of more than three seconds the subtitle *الخبر المملكة العربية السعودية*. If we consider the scene, it represents a terrorist attack on a hotel in the city of Khobar in Saudi Arabia. It is a sequence which justifies that the latter is a victim of terrorism as it shows images of Saudi people in panic and gunmen shooting innocent citizens who are trying to run away. So, we may argue that the translator has manipulatively dropped this sequence from the other manipulative strategies to make the audience aware that the country is a victim of terrorism rather than a perpetrator.

As far as political manipulation is concerned, we believe that patronage is the only one responsible for these acts of manipulation. The MBC group is owned by a Saudi capital, though it claims to be directed to all Arab viewers as its slogan suggests: *“the world through Arabian eyes”*. In other terms, the patronage is Saudi, while the poetics are defined within the Arab culture and literature. Nevertheless, if we consider the process of manipulation the movie has undergone, we may come to the conclusion that it is imposed by patronage.

Throughout the movie, there is use of the names of other Arab countries, but are never manipulated in translation.

Situation: FBI agent Debbie informs Maya of her finding concerning Abu Ahmed
Debbie: Hi, I painstakingly combed through everything in the system and found this. It’s him. He was one of ten names on a watch list sent to us by the Moroccans after 9/11. Ibrahim Sayeed.
ديبي: مرحباً، لقد مشطت بشقا الأنف كل شيء في النظام ووجدته هذا، إنه هو، لقد كانوا أحدًا من عشرة أسماء علقوا انما لمر اقبه التيار سلها لنا المغاربة بعد 11 سبتمبر، إبراهيم سعيد.

‘The Moroccans’ means the Moroccan intelligence agency. Its use is identical to the scene discussed earlier in which ‘the Saudis’ was translated *المخابر انا الأجنبيّة*. In a previous sequence in the film, we come across the following text:

Situation: FBI agents in Pakistan briefing Daniel
Jessica: The Jordanians are being really helpful with Ammar’s transit papers
الأردنيون متعاونون نحققاً فيار سالأور اعمار: جيسكا

The Jordanians, like the Saudis and the Moroccans, should have been approached in the same way regarding their translation. This also goes on for the names of countries.

Situation: Debbie giving information about Abu Ahmed
Debbie: they think his whole family and extended family is bad, and has ties to KSM. He was picked up for fake papers and a doctored exit visa leaving Afghanistan, traveling through Morocco , en route to Kuwait .
ديبي: يعتقدون أن جميع أفراد عائلته وأقاربهم وباطمخالد شيخ محمد. تم القبض عليهم بسبب أوراق مزورة وتأشير خروج مزورة مغادرًا أفغانستان، مسافرًا عبر المغرب، في طريقه إلى الكويت.

The subtitler does not need any manipulative technique to camouflage Morocco/ المغرب or Kuwait/ الكويت as it has been done with Saudi Arabia. More than that, there was not any discomfort in linking **Kuwait** with one of the bad guys of Al Qaeda.

Situation: Maya talking to Ammar
Maya: what's his family name? Ammar: Abu Ahmed Al Kuwaiti.
مايا: ما هو اسم عائلته؟ عمار: أبو أحمد الكويتي

The term 'الكويتي' means of a Kuwaiti nationality, the Kuwaiti. In two other situations Abu Ahmed is directly linked to the country of Kuwait.

Situation: Maya is viewing a video of a soldier interrogating a prisoner.
Soldier: There was a guy called Abu Ahmed from Kuwait .
Prisoner: Yes I remember him ; he was a nice guy.
الجندي: كان هنا كرجل يدعى أبو أحمد من الكويت. السجين: نعم أذكره. كان رجلاً لطيفاً.

Situation: Daniel is asking a Kuwaiti businessman for help
Daniel: Who do you think? The guy is a terrorist. His mother lives here. We just need her number.
Kuwaiti businessman: there will be no repercussions in Kuwait .
دانيال: منتظن؟ الرجل رهابي. تعيش والدته هنا. نحقق طبخا لرقمها. رجل أعمال كويتي: لن يكون هنا كتدابير عيات في الكويت.

So, Abu Ahmed is a 'bad' 'terrorist' from 'Kuwait'. And the subtitler translates that into Arabic accurately and transparently. In the whole movie, Abu Ahmed's name is mentioned 34 times and he was linked to Kuwait 6 times. As a matter of fact, we come to the conclusion that while all references to Saudi Arabia are manipulated, the references to other Arab countries are not, even when they are linked to terrorist acts.

Another case to discuss here is the invisible antagonist in the movie Usama Bin Laden. Though he never shows up on screen, the entire story revolves around him. His name is mentioned 48 times. Surprisingly enough, his name never appears in the Arabic subtitles. When Bin Laden's name occurs, it is either substituted by the Arabic word **المتهم** meaning the convict or **المتهم الرئيسي** / the principal convict.

Situation: Maya, Jessica and Daniel are discussing the Khobar attacks
Jessica: Oh, you have to be really careful with people in Khaled Sheikh Muhammad's circle, they're devious. Maya: He's not gonna talk about attacks in the homeland. He's gonna withhold operational details on the KSM network... and probably bin Laden .
جيسيكَا: أو ه، عليك أن تكون حذراً احقاً مع الأَشْخَاصِ فَيَدَانِرَةُ خَالِدِ شَيْخِ مُحَمَّدٍ، فَهَمْ خَادِعُونَ، لَنِي تَحْدِثُ عَلَيْنَا هَجْمَاتٍ فِي الْوَطَنِ. سَيَحْجِبُ الْتَفَاصِيلَ الْعَمَلِيَّةِ عَنْ شَبْكَةِ خَالِدِ شَيْخِ مُحَمَّدٍ ... وَرَبَّمَا الْمَتَهَمَ الرَّئِيسَ: مَيَا
Jessica: Oh, you have to be really careful with people in Khaled Sheikh Muhammad's circle, they're devious. Maya: He's not gonna talk about attacks in the homeland. He's gonna withhold operational details on the KSM network... and probably the principle convict .

Let's consider the exchange above. Two names are mentioned in the English text: Khaled sheikh Muhammad and Usama Bin Laden. Khaled Sheikh Muhammad is the Fifth man in Al Qaeda, and he is Pakistani. His name occurs in Arabic, which is quite normal, while the name of Bin Laden is missing and replaced by **المتهم الرئيسي**. This strategy of substitution is applied all along the subtitles of the movie during the 48 occurrences of the name Bin Laden. All other Al Qaeda names mentioned in the movie are transcribed in Arabic, with the exception of the antagonist in the movie.

Al Qaeda Members mentioned in the movie	Their Arabic names
Usama Bin Laden	المتهم الرئيسي
Atiyah Abdul-Rahman Zawahiri	عطية عبدالرحمن الظواهري أبو فرج خالد شيخ محمد أبو أحمد الكويتي حمزة بن بيعة خباب المصري
Abu Faraj Khalid Sheikh Mohammed Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti Hamza Rabia Khabab al-Masri	

Even the name of the 'terrorist' organization Al Qaeda never appears on screen in Arabic. The term is uttered 17 times by different characters in various contexts in the movie. Nevertheless, each time the term Al Qaeda is mentioned, you can read in Arabic **التنظيم** / the organization or **لتنظيم المسلح** / the armed organization.

Situation: Maya interrogates Hassan Gul, Al Qaeda financier, in a prison in Islamabad
Gul: What do you want to know? Maya: I'm gonna ask you a series of questions, based on your knowledge of Al-Qaeda , and your position as key financier for the organization. Gul: I have dealt with the horrors. I have no wish to be tortured again. Ask me a question, I will answer it.
جول: ماذا تريد أن تعرف؟ مايا: سأطرح عليك سلسلة من الأسئلة، بناءً على معرفتك بالتنظيم المسلح، وموقعك كممول رئيسي للتنظيم. غول: لقد تعاملت مع أهوال. ليس لدي رغبة في أن أعذب مرة أخرى. اطرح علي سؤالاً سأجيب عليه.
Gul: What do you want to know? Maya: I'm gonna ask you a series of questions, based on your knowledge of the armed organization , and your position as key financier for the organization. Gul: I have dealt with the horrors. I have no wish to be tortured again. Ask me a question, I will answer it.

The term Al Qaeda is never displayed on screen. Though the term has become a universal proper noun found in almost all dictionaries and encyclopedias, the subtitler insists on referring to it as an unknown concept. According to the online Encyclopedia Britannica, 'Al-Qaeda, Arabic al-Qā'idah ("the Base"), [is a] broad-based militant Islamist organization founded by [Osama bin Laden](#) in the late 1980s. In spite of that, the term Al Qaeda is ignored and subsequently manipulated because it is tacitly related to Saudi Arabia. The founder is Saudi, and so are most of its militants. More than that, many Saudi and Middle Eastern viewers have a positive attitude towards the organization and think that it was a victim of the American 'unjust war on terrorism.' These facts might explain why the word Al Qaeda is manipulated throughout the whole movie.

4. Conclusion

'Zero Dark Thiry', is a good representation of manipulative practices driven by political motives. From the very first scene, bilingual viewers can notice that the translation of a caption: The Saudi group is totally 'wrong'. The Arabic subtitles have undergone heavy manipulation. First, any reference to Saudi Arabia is either omitted or substituted by الأجنبيّة/foreign. Also, the name of Usama bin Laden, though mentioned tens of times in the movies, receives similar treatment. It is mostly translated as المتهم الرئيسي / the principal convict in an attempt to blur the viewers' vision of events in the movie. Even the name of the 'terrorist' organization Al Qaeda is manipulated.

We may come to the conclusion that this manipulation is driven by patronage solely, namely the Saudi owner of the channel, as the reference to other Middle Eastern countries is kept and sometimes even emphasized (as is the case with Kuwait). The patronage's concern is to whiten the Saudi's page. They attempt to clear any implication of Saudi Arabia in the 9/11 attacks. As a matter of fact, the task of the subtitler is kind of 'mission impossible. How can it be possible to manipulate a movie that completely indicts the Saudis and make it lose its offensiveness? The result, in my opinion, is not satisfactory as the manipulation has ended up by making the movie almost meaningless.

Conflict of Interest Statement

I have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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