

## Articles

# Transcreation Strategies in Dubbing a Humorous Hybrid-Text Type Advert into Arabic – Is Vernacular the Panacea?

*Estratégias de transcrição na dublagem de um anúncio humorístico de tipo de texto híbrido para o árabe - Vernacular é a panaceia?*

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### ABSTRACT

*Adapting advertisements across distant languages and cultures poses challenges due to their heavy cultural context. Complicating matters, some ads mix various text types and genres. This study explores strategies for translating a humor-laden, hybrid-text ad into Arabic through dubbing. It investigates the effectiveness of different Arabic variants. The case study is an audiovisual ad by [standup2cancer.org](http://standup2cancer.org), featuring a cartoon Homer from *The Simpsons*, created to raise colon cancer awareness. Animation often escapes criticism due to its surreal nature, unlike real depictions that might be distasteful. Using Skopos Theory, the translations were analyzed, focusing on the decision-making process in creating functionally suitable versions for Arab audiences. A Think Aloud Protocol gathered data on*

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*participants' decision agency during translation, validating choices. Most translators (80%) preferred Arabic vernacular, employing domestication (adaptation) as a macro-strategy and cultural substitution as a micro-strategy. Humor transfer succeeded best in Arabic vernacular, reinforcing its suitability for various text types and genres.*

**Keywords:** *transcreation; hybrid text; dubbing; strategies; Arabic diglossia.*

## RESUMO

*Transcrever anúncios em línguas e culturas distantes é desafiador, dada a carga cultural destes. A complexidade é ampliada quando os anúncios mesclam tipos e gêneros de texto. Este estudo visa explorar estratégias para traduzir anúncios híbridos humorísticos para árabe por dublagem, analisando a eficácia de diferentes variantes árabes. O estudo de caso é um anúncio audiovisual da [standup2cancer.org](http://standup2cancer.org), com o personagem Homer dos Simpsons, criado para conscientização do câncer de cólon. A animação evita críticas devido à sua natureza surreal, ao contrário de representações reais que podem ser desagradáveis. Utilizando a Teoria do Skopos, as traduções foram analisadas, focando as decisões para versões funcionalmente adequadas à audiência árabe. O Protocolo Verbal foi usado para coletar dados sobre a agência decisória dos participantes, validando escolhas. A maioria dos tradutores (80%) preferiu o vernáculo árabe, usando domesticação como macroestratégia e substituição cultural como microestratégia. A transferência de humor teve sucesso no vernáculo árabe, reforçando sua adequação para diversos tipos e gêneros de texto.*

**Palavras-chave:** *transcrição; texto híbrido; dublagem; estratégias; diglossia árabe.*

## 1. Introduction

The inextricable relevance of culture to translation studies has enabled translators in the late twentieth century, in light of the cultural turn, to move beyond the traditional dichotomies of equivalence and fidelity that long dominated the field. In the expanding landscape of audiovisual translation, and because cultural and ideological forces permeate and shape the word-image interplay, new strategies such

as transcreation emerged on the scene to provide freer approaches to translation. Transcreation, more often than not, is called for in the world of advertising, especially since commercially oriented texts are culture-specific, designed with a purpose in mind, and, as is the present case, contain an amalgam of humor and scientific jargon. As Pedersen (2014) argues, transcreation “seeks to perform all the adjustments necessary to make a campaign work in all target markets while at the same time staying loyal to the original creative intent of the campaign” (p. 58). Pedersen’s remark hints at the potential asymmetry and inaccessibility of cultural references that require extensive yet creative adaptation methods to ensure not only the linguistic and cultural acceptability of advertisements in the target culture but also to fulfil the advertisement’s purpose by producing the same desirable effect on the target audience.

## 2. Audiovisual translation as an intersemiotic translation

Audiovisual products occupy a semiotic space where the verbal and visual codes interact and are simultaneously expressed to create a meaningful whole. As a result of this dialogic exchange, rooted in the culture of origin, audiovisual translation (AVT) in general and advertisements, in particular, acquire the status of intersemiotic translation (Freitas, 2004; Taylor, 2020; Torresi, 2008). Extensive definitions have been formulated to characterize intersemiotic translation, Jakobson (1959) and Toury (1986) being the most notable ones; however, this study adopts Dusi’s (2005) definition as it immediately recognizes the inevitability of creative intercultural mediation. According to Dusi, intersemiotic translation is “not a simple transcodification but a transcultural, dynamic and functional event caught between the requirement to remain faithful to the source and the need to transform it into a text that is understood and accepted in the target culture” (2005, p. 183). What is of interest here is to examine how advertisements, which are “social, economic and cultural phenomenon[a]... characterized by a special use of language” (Ruiz & García, 2010, p. 148), are dubbed from English into Arabic via transcreation strategies, and how, and to what extent, language variety (Modern Standard Arabic or Vernacular Arabic) plays a fundamental role in the dubbing of humorous hybrid-text types.

### 3. Dubbing as a mode of audiovisual translation

Dubbing is a common AVT mode that, as Chaume (2012) aptly puts it, “consists of replacing the original track of a film’s (or any audiovisual text) source language dialogues with another track on which translated dialogues have been recorded in the target language [while] [t]he remaining tracks are left untouched” (p. 1). The removal of the original verbal narration emphasizes the established synergies between the inviolable visual narration and the translator’s creative (i.e., transadaptive) negotiation. That is to say, as the visuals cannot be manipulated and are in synthesis with other codes, the translator is obliged to find “an equally synthetic message” or “isotopic solutions” in the target verbal subtext by means of creative manipulation, as Chaume argues (1998, p. 17-18). In Chaume’s opinion, the textual constraints arising therefrom are not constraints *per se* but are permissive grounds for (re)creation; nonetheless, translators cannot easily extricate themselves from cultural and ideological constraints. In a similar vein, Muhanna (2014) views dubbing as a four-dimensional space where meaning has to be conveyed within a fixed timeframe that reflects the context-specific body language while taking into account lip-synchronization and characters’ bilabial movements. But the most critical dimension is that humor and cultural references should be legible and relayed appropriately.

Following this line of reasoning, it is inevitable that dubbing will become a medium of manipulation and censorship (Díaz Cintas, 2012; Kovarski, 1996; Zanotti, 2012), and the conglomerate chain of agents involved in the dubbing process –dialogue translator, dialogue adapter, actors, dubbing director, etc.– clearly reflects the different phases of manipulation. This goes to show that translators act within a social context, and this context reciprocally influences the translator’s ideology (Hatim & Mason, 1997; Tymoczko, 2003). The rewriting of values indicates that “translation is *parti pris* and that translators are engaged, actively involved, and affiliated with cultural movements” (Tymoczko, 2003, p. 200). In the Arab context, dubbing is the preferred mode of engagement since it promotes a sense of pan-Arabism and nationalism that counterweighs the linguistic hegemony of the English *lingua franca* on the one hand (Di Giovanni, 2016) and constitutes a censorial apparatus to conceal what is deemed inappropriate by an

“Arab society which lives by religious, cultural and, in some countries, tribal values” (Yahiaoui, 2016, p. 196).

### *Dubbing as a cultural adaptation*

While some researchers such as Thomas (1998), advocate faithfulness to the source culture to provoke “a healthy, creative and potentially fruitful clash of cultures” (p. 107), and Mazi-Leskovar (2003) who considers retaining the exotic and the foreign in translation “to be a stimulus to reading” (p. 254), others stipulate that integrating adaptive interventions (Agost, 2004) and developing cultural sensitivity (Valdés Rodríguez, 2008) are necessary measures in dubbing, or as Zabalbeascoa (1996) phrased it, “necessary evil[s]” (p. 235). This parallels notions of acceptability and naturalness, the latter which in the realm of dubbing has been referred to as ‘prefabricated orality’ and ‘contrived realism’. *A fortiori*, it is safe to argue that dubbing is one form of cultural adaptation that addresses the logistics of cultural difference by recontextualizing the original in line with the target culture’s identity and values. As a strategy, this cultural filtering fits Chesterman’s (2016) descriptions, namely that a strategy is a goal-oriented and problem-centered process that reacts to norms, involves textual manipulation, intersubjectivity, and is potentially conscious. Adaptation here - which encompasses the use of vernacular varieties – is distinguished as a macro-strategy (Federici, 2011; Newmark, 1988) that shares the same continuum with standardization – the minimization of language diversity in a multilingual society. For the sake of the current discussion, four micro-strategies are also distinguished: cultural substitution (replacing culture-specific items or expressions with ones more identifiable in the target culture), paraphrase (re-expressing the source item but in a different form), omission (often viewed as a form of subversion due to cultural clashes), and borrowing (the incorporation of source items without translation).

### *Arabic diglossia and dubbing*

Dubbing and the entire spectrum of cultural adaptation into Arabic cannot be adequately discussed without first looking at the

diglossic landscape of the Arabic language. Charles Ferguson (1959), the godfather of diglossia, defines the term as “[a] relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety” and he further states that the latter is “the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature [...] learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used [...] for ordinary conversation” (p. 336). Ferguson’s definition attends to complex processes such as, *inter alia*, language prestige, function and standardization, something which compartmentalizes the Arabic language within two varieties: a high variety and a low variety, representing Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and vernacular Arabic, respectively.

Drawing on Amara and Mar’i’s discussion, Alsaḥafi (2016) maintains that MSA’s elevated status in the Arabic society pertains to its liturgical function in Islam and Islamic heritage and the way it serves as a “unifying cultural force in Arab nationalism” (p. 4). That is why Linn et al. (2018) consider standardization a desideratum, “something aspirational” and “an ideal form against which other forms can be judged” (p. 27). Unlike Standard Arabic, the *lingua franca* of Muslims, vernacular Arabic varies according to geographical and social aspects that typologise the varieties into four regional classifications: The Iraqi/Gulf vernacular, the Levantine vernacular, Egyptian vernacular, and the Maghrib vernacular. However, the Egyptian vernacular remains the most widely adopted option in dubbing, sometimes in lieu of or after the traditional MSA. As I have argued elsewhere (Yahiaoui & Fattah 2020; Yahiaoui et al., 2019; Al-Adwan & Yahiaoui 2018), the Egyptian vernacular is not only widely popular, but also an ideal conduit to convey humor, satire and irony.

### *Hybrid texts in translation*

Hybridity is a term that has been the subject of extensive research across a broad range of disciplines and interdisciplines, including translation studies. For instance, Schäffner and Adab (1997) suggest that hybrid texts are instigated by intercultural contact and are the

result of translation; therefore, one definitive feature of hybridity is its non-conformity to the target culture's norms. Conveniently, the duo provide advertising as an example given that it helps "create a new global culture" and "often rely on knowledge, recognition and acceptance of social conventions and/or taboos" (Adab, 1997, p. 326). Schäffner and Adab's views of hybridity are similarly ricocheted by Pym (2001) from a cross-cultural communication perspective and Snell-Hornby (2001) from a post-colonial perspective. Nonetheless, hybridity is understood here in the sense elaborated by Hatim and Mason (1997) when they assert that hybrid texts "are multifunctional, normally displaying features of more than one type, and constantly shifting from one type to another. Given this inevitable hybridization, no categories, no matter how rigorously worked out, can be expected to be definitive" (Hatim & Mason, 1997, p. 107). Text-type and hybridity echo, to a great extent, Reiß's well-worn typology. Reiß (1981) identifies three functional dimensions: informative (logical), expressive (aesthetic), and operative (dialogic); yet she, in light of the technological integration in translation, adds a fourth dimension: the audio-medial text-type, which she places above the other three since "it possesses its own regularities" (Reiß, 1981, p. 125). However, she dismisses the dimensions' purity, mainly because they are synergistic and dependent on the communicative intention. Of course, text-typology cannot be mentioned without reference to the coterminous Skopos theory (Reiß & Vermeer, 1984/2014). Simply put, the theory states that the translational action is governed by its purpose, which automatically gives precedence to the target setting, target addressee, and target culture. To successfully achieve the source text's skopos, translators resort to a plethora of translation strategies, similar to the micro-strategies mentioned earlier.

### *Homer's colonoscopy, the advertisement*

*Homer's colonoscopy* is an advertisement broadcast in 2008 for Stand Up to Cancer (SU2C) organization, which according to their website, is created "to raise funds to accelerate the pace of groundbreaking translational research that can get new therapies to patients quickly and save lives now". The advertisement, hence,

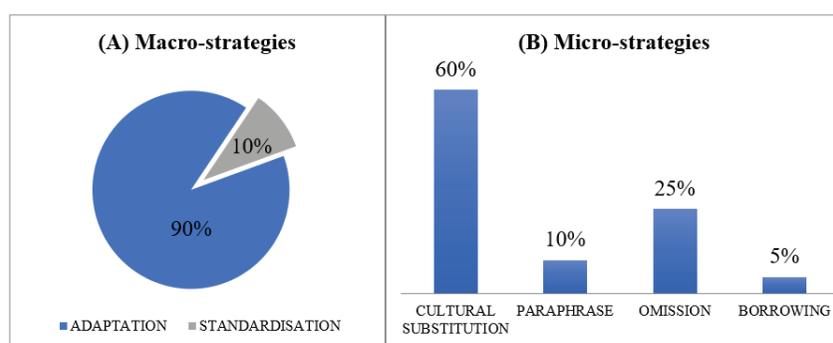
aims to raise awareness of the importance of examination for early detection and treatment of colon cancer, and in one way or another, urges the viewers to donate. Viewed from the prism of hybridity, the advert is informative (transmits knowledge about colon cancer), operative (raises awareness and persuades viewers to consider early detection examinations), and audio-medial (as a verbal text infused with visual images). This amalgamation makes the advert simultaneously entertaining, educational, and scientific, which holistically serve the advert's skopos. In fact, resorting to *The Simpsons* as the intertextual basis of the advert is rather ingenious when it comes to appeal and familiarity. As Beard (2004) observes, the American sitcom "is not a form of global culture, but of local culture with a global reach" (Beard, 2004, p. 290). In other words, although the genesis of *The Simpsons* came within the American culture and exhausts culture-specific references relevant to that culture, the show manages to transcend the local constraints because the humor is based on the visuals. Moreover, Homer's personality, signposted by his lack of intelligence and forthright views, provides comic relief to an otherwise serious and critical subject.

That said, and to reiterate, this paper's objective is bipartite: first, to investigate the strategies employed to deal with an array of issues that arise in the dubbing of a hybrid-text type that also includes scientific jargon and cultural and religious references for dubbing into Arabic. Second, to test which of the Arabic language variants is more suitable for such a task. In the present transcreation 'experiment', thirty-six participants were asked to translate the advert into either MSA or in one of its vernacular varieties. The participants' translations were then accordingly analyzed and further triangulated using a think-aloud protocol – in the form of question prompts – to fully gauge the participants' agency in terms of decision making in the translation process and to validate their decisions. The analysis is divided according to three thematic issues the participants had to deal with: cultural issues, taboo issues, and religious issues. These themes are overlapping and intertwined with one another, but the main idea is that the issues represent different dimensions of ideology. For the sake of methodical treatment, I examine the transcreations made in MSA, followed by their vernacular counterparts (accordingly divided into group A and group B).

#### 4. Analysis and discussion

As brokers of linguistic and cultural communication, translators are, by principle, in a mediation position that allows them to see the problem from the conciliatory and flexible angle of interculturality, which, in turn, influences the language choice and strategies they use. In relation to the former, 80% of the participants opted for the vernacular (Egyptian, Qatari, Syrian, and Tunisian), whereas the remaining 20% used standard Arabic. Figure 1 visually represents the participants' variation in using macro and micro strategies.

**Figure 1** — Participants' use of macro and micro strategies



Apropos of macro-strategies, the great majority preferred adaptation over standardization and primarily used cultural substitution and omission when it comes to micro-strategies, followed by paraphrase and borrowing, respectively. Let us take now a case of textual adaptation that illustrates, among other things, the ideological dimension of advertising.

#### *Cultural issues*

The advert's primary source of humor derives from its cultural embeddedness, a combination that lends texts, generally speaking, a degree of untranslatability, or makes translating humor "as desperate as that of translating poetry" Diot (1989, p. 84). Culture is inherent in the language, a quality often manifested using culture-specific items.

Culture specifics, according to Ramière (2006), are “verbal and non-verbal (visual and auditory) signs which constitute a problem for cross-cultural transfer because they refer to objects or concepts that are specific to the original sociocultural context” (p. 155). Along the same lines, Leppihalme (1997) differentiates between ‘transcultural’ allusions (the meaning is mutually recognized in the source and target cultures) and ‘culture-specific’ allusions (the meaning is exclusively known to those familiar with the source culture). Consequently, she concludes that culture specifics cannot be retained in translation because they will be unrecognizable or meaningless for the target audience. That said, translation solutions always foster creativity to achieve successful intercultural transfer. Let us examine MSA renditions first (see Table 1).

**Table 1** — Reconstructing socio-cultural items (MSA)

Source Text	Target Text	Back Translation
(1a) But this time you won't be doing it to win a <b>bar bet</b>	- ولن يكون ذلك لجعلك تستمتع بلحظات جميلة - ولكن هذه المرة ليس لكسب رهان - ولكن هذه المرة لن تفعل هذا من أجل كسب مباريات الحانة	- And that won't be to make you have a good time - But this time not to win a bet - But this time you won't be doing it to win bar games
(2a) Welcome to the <b>Mayo Clinic</b> ... mmm Mayo!	- مرحباً بك في عيادة (ميو) واو، مايونيز! - مرحباً بكم في مركز ماما الطبي - مرحباً بك في عيادتكم... عما يتحدث؟	- Welcome to Mayo Clinic...wow mayonnaise! - Welcome to Mom's Medical Centre - Welcome to your clinic...what is he talking about?
(3a) This is my <b>Moby Dick!</b> This is my <b>Sergeant Peppers!</b>	- هذا (موبي ديك) وهذه هي فرقة (بيتلز) - إنه قصتي الخيالية، إنه ألبومي الموسيقي المفضل! - فانوسي السحري.	- This is Moby Dick, and this is the Beatles - My fictitious story, my favorite music album! - My magical lamp
(4a) To <b>Krusty Burger!</b>	- هيا، إلى (كراستي برغر) - إلى مطعم البرغر	- Let's go to Krusty Burger - To a burger restaurant

Example (1a) shows the use of a forbidden place ('bar') and a forbidden practice ('bet') in Muslim societies (Quran: Surah 2, verse 219; Surah 5, verse 90). The Islamic prohibition of such cultural concepts led one participant to omit the expression and replace it with 'تستمتع بلحظات جميلة' [to make you have a good time], which is connected to the procedural discomfort prompted by the colonoscopy. Here, the participant is recontextualizing the cultural item in relation to the advert's medical setting to make his/her transcreation relevant to the narrative. Another translation omits the term 'bar' but retains 'bet' as in 'لكسب رهان' [to win a bet], whereas the third translation inversely paraphrases 'bet' but retains 'bar' as in 'كسب مباريات الحانة' [to win bar games]. The cultural items 'bar' (where alcohol is served) and 'bet' (one form of gambling) are transcultural if we apply Leppihalme's distinction; that is, although they are understood in Muslim societies, they are prohibited.

Example (2a) is more pun-oriented; the humor relies on both verbal and referential sources. Here, the proctologist welcomes Homer to his clinic, Mayo clinic, which triggers Homer to think about 'Mayonnaise'. In reality, Mayo Clinic is a reputable non-profit medical center commonly known in the United States; hence, the proper name 'Mayo' is a socioculturally bound item and constitutes a homophonic pun when linked to the contracted 'mayo'. Antonopoulou (2004) accentuates the retention of proper noun allusions in translation stating that if an entity is mentioned by name, then it is assumed that «the entity in question is worth naming and mentioning by name and/or [...] that the recipient of the message is in the position to identify the referent» (p. 243). Cultural implications are immediately conceivable, as it is likely that the recipient might not get the humorous inferences, or they cannot be replicated in translation. On one occasion, the pun has been retained using the borrowing strategy, and it achieves the humorous effect, albeit the target audience would not think of the proper name 'عيادة (ميو)' [Mayo Clinic] as an allusion to an actual entity. Another translation not only omits the pun, but it also re-names the clinic as 'مركز ماما الطبي' [Mom's Medical Centre], a choice that might indicate ulterior motives. The pun has been sacrificed likewise in 'مرحباً بك في عيادتك. . عما يتحدث؟' [welcome to your clinic... what is he talking about?], which is a problematic rendition, particularly as Homer's facial expressions in the advert does not suggest confusion.

Example (3a) shows a double use of culture-specific items: one literary and the other musical. On the one hand, ‘Moby Dick’ is the eponymous antagonist of Melville’s novel of the same name, a gigantic whale that Captain Ahab vowed to hunt for and destroy (in this context, the proctologist is likened to Ahab and Homer’s rear that of the whale). On the other hand, ‘Sergeant Peppers’ is a music album by the English band The Beatles and is considered a masterpiece by many (after uttering the words, the proctologist miraculously pulls out a Sergeant Peppers music CD). One participant retained the cultural allusion of ‘Moby Dick’ yet paraphrased ‘Sergeant Peppers’ to ‘The Beatles’, which can be assumed to be a name more recognizable in the target culture: ‘هذا (موبي ديك) وهذه هي فرقة (بيتلز) [this is Moby Dick and this is the Beatles]. Another participant exchanges the connotative meanings with the denotative, making the cultural items more explicit. The translation reads as ‘إنه قصتي الخيالية، إنه ألبومي الموسيقي المفضل’ [my fictitious story, my favorite music album]. The references are explained to allow for easier recognition, albeit the cognitive appreciation of the joke is lost in translation. A different translation integrates instead an allusion to the *Arabian Nights*, which is a canonical text in Arabic literature, via the use of Aladdin’s lamp: ‘فانوسي السحري’ [my magical lamp].

When Homer wakes after the colonoscopy, he decides to immediately pay a visit to ‘Krusty Burger’, a restaurant located in the fictitious town of Springfield that serves unconventional fast food, to ‘test drive’ his new colon. As example (4a) shows, the proper name was either rendered as it is in translation ‘إلى كرسطي برغر’ [let’s go to Krusty Burger] or underwent a shift to signify any restaurant ‘إلى مطعم البرغر’ [to a burger restaurant]. However, it is fair to postulate that the comedic effect arises not directly from the name but from Homer’s decision to consume fast food immediately after the excision of the polyps. In this instance, the SU2C organization is highlighting the role of trans fatty acids (found in fast food) in affecting the digestive system in general and the colon in particular. The following excerpts in Table 2 exhibit creative cultural reconstruction of the source text’s material when switching to dialectal varieties by which the original setting is localized according to the participants’ sociocultural environment.

**Table 2** — Reconstructing socio-cultural items (**vernacular**)

Source Text	Target Text	Back Translation
(1b) But this time, you won't be doing it to win a <b>bar bet</b>	- هادي مش بش تعملها على <b>خاطر خاطر</b> - بس المرة دي مش حتكسب من <b>وراها فلوس!</b>	- This is not for you to use for a bet - But this time, you are not getting any money from it
(2b) Welcome to the <b>Mayo Clinic</b> ... mmm Mayo!	- نورتنا يا أستاذ في Colonoscopy Centre - مرحبا بيك في كلينيك حشيشة، ممم، شيشة - أهلين بعيادة دعيول، ممم، معمول	- Welcome to the Colonoscopy Centre - Welcome to the Hashisha Clinic ... mmm shisha! - Welcome to Daaboul Clinic ... mmm maamoul!
(3b) This is my <b>Moby Dick!</b> This is my <b>Sergeant Peppers!</b>	- دي شي يحنط للأجيال القادمة - هادي عزيزة عثمانة، وهاذي - فطومة بورقبيبة، هادي عليسة وحنبل - دا حلم عمري، إيه العظمى دي! دا ألبوم أم كلثوم - آيه والله أحلى من ١٠٠١ سهرة بقاسيون على أنغام الست فيروز العظيمة	- This should be mummified for future generations! - This is Aziza Athamna, Fatouma Bourguiba... these are Alisa and Hanaabal - This is the dream of my life. What a great thing! This is Umm Kulthum's album! - I swear, it's better than 100 concerts by the great Fairouz in Qasioun
(4b) To <b>Krusty Burger!</b>	- مشينا هريس الوالدة - يالا بينا على أبو شقرة حالا! - عند كشرى أبو طارق	- Let's go to <i>Harees Al-Waldah</i> [lit. Mum's Harees] - Let's go to <i>Abu Shakra</i> right now! - To <i>Abu Tareq's</i> Kushari

Example (1b) displays the participants' concurrent omission of 'bar' and the hedging of 'bet' to connote the involvement of money, as in 'مش حتكسب من وراها فلوس' [you are not getting any money from it] to gain appropriate reception. Although the translation 'خاطر خاطر [to use for a bet] uses a Tunisian term for 'bet', most Arab viewers would not recognize the connotation.

Two strategies can be observed when looking at example (2b); the ‘Mayo-mayo’ pun was either eliminated or culturally recreated. For instance, one participant decided to re-name the clinic as ‘Colonoscopy Centre’ to generally refer to the procedure. In contrast, two other participants relied on assonant rhyming and cultural items to preserve the pun. To elucidate, ‘كلينيك حشيشة، ممم، شيشة’ [Hashisha Clinic, mmm shisha!] re-names the clinic ‘Hashisha’ (meaning weed) and uses the culture-specific item ‘shisha’ (a type of smoking prevalent in Arab culture) to convey the pun. Identically ‘عيادة دعبول، ممم، معمول’ [Daaboul Clinic, mmm ma’amoul!] re-names the clinic ‘Daaboul’ (which means fat man in some Levantine dialects) and relates it to ‘ma’amoul’, which is a popular sweet in the Arabian Peninsula.

Example (3b) reflects the de-americanization of the source text in translation. For instance, ‘دي شي يحنط للأجيال القادمة’ [this should be mummified for future generations!] substitutes the original references using the ancient Egyptian practice of mummification. Meanwhile, ‘هاذي عزيزة عثمانة، وهاذي فطومة بورقيبة، هاذي عليسة وحنبل’ [this is Aziza Athamna, Fatouma Bourguib, these are Alisa and Hanaabal] is rich in Tunisian allusions to famous historical figures and places. Other participants primarily focused on transadapting ‘Sergeant Peppers’ using celebrated singers in the Arab world, such as the Egyptian Umm Kulthum and the Lebanese Fairuz. Therefore, ‘this is my Sergeant Peppers’ becomes ‘إيه العظمة دي! ده ألبوم أم كلثوم’ [what a great thing! This is Umm Kulthum’s album!], and in another becomes ‘أيه والله أحلى’ [I swear, it’s better than 100 concerts by the great Fairouz in Qasioun]. In fact, the appearance of the album after the verbal remark represents what Zabalbeascoa (1994) calls the visual joke, «the joke which depends on a combination of words and picture and where the translator can only hope to find some form of compensation in words that will cover the same images, which cannot be altered by convention» (p. 97). This explains why the focus was only on the music reference; to avoid dissonance between the verbal and the visual channels.

Cultural substitution is also evident in example (4b), in which ‘Krusty Burger’ was adapted to ‘هريس الوالدة’ [Harees Al-Waldah], ‘أبو شقرة’ [Abu Shakra], and ‘كشري أبو طارق’ [Abu Tareq’s Kushari]. All the adaptations mention famous restaurants in Qatar and Egypt,

respectively, that serve traditional food (i.e., the Khaliji hariss, the Egyptian Kushari). These renditions, in one way or another, corroborate the view that the translatability of culture-related jokes does not require an obligation to linguistic structures more than it requires the translator's successful delivery of the joke.

### *Taboo issues*

Allan (2001) interprets taboo words as “those considered offensive, shocking, or indecent when used in certain contexts” (p. 148). Likewise, Knowles (2000) defines taboo as “a social or religious custom prohibiting or restricting a particular practice or forbidding association with a particular person, place, or thing” (p. 1072). Interestingly enough, Ghazalah (2003) notes that “Standard Arabic monolingual and bilingual dictionaries usually have no entries for taboo words for sociocultural and religious reasons” (p. 213). All these conceptualizations encapsulate the fact that taboo words are culture-specific, which entails the perception that taboo is not ubiquitous in all cultures. Naturally, this heterogeneity adds a layer of constraint to the translator. In a conservative culture such as that of the Arab culture, which is predominantly governed by religion and societal customs, it is rarely the case that taboo words would not be euphemized or censored. The following excerpts in Table 3 illustrate how taboo references have been rendered in MSA.

**Table 3** — Taboo language (MSA)

Source Text	Target Text	Back Translation
(5a) You're having your <b>boobs embiggened</b> ?	هل ستجميلين أنفك السمين؟ تريدين تكبير صدرك؟ ستقومين بعملية تجميل؟	- Are you beautifying your fat nose? - You want to make your chest bigger? - You are having plastic surgery?
(6a) They stick a camera up <b>your ah-ow!</b>	يدخلون كاميرا في منطقة "الواوا" سيدخلون كاميرا في جزئك الخلفي يتطلب هذا وضع آلة تصوير داخل أسفل جسمك	- They will insert a camera in the 'wawa' area - They will insert a camera in your back-side. - This requires putting a camera inside your lower part
(7a) <b>This ass</b> is why I became a doctor!	كم أنا محظوظ! هذا ما جعلني أدخل مهنة الطب! بسبب هذه المؤخرة أصبحت طبيباً! إن هذا الجسم سبب أرغبني في أن أكون طبيباً!	- How lucky I am! - This is why I joined medicine - because of this ass, I became a doctor - This body is what made me want to become a doctor!

As the back translations indicate, rendering sexually suggestive words into Arabic underwent significant shifts, indicating that the participants are conscious of the target norms and culture. In example (5a) for instance, Homer's instantaneous suggestion 'boobs embiggened?' has been replaced with less offensive and more acceptable terms, as in 'ستجميلين أنفك السمين?' [beautifying your fat nose?] and 'ستقومين بعملية تجميل?' [having plastic surgery?]. Since the connotations of the original are sensitive, the translations display evasive substitutions to avoid cultural infringement. However, 'تريدين تكبير صدرك?' [make your chest bigger?] euphemistically attempted to disguise the unpleasantness and embarrassment by using an alternative form capable of communicating the same meaning without being overtly explicit (Al-Adwan, 2015). As Farghal (1995) claims, the pragmatic reliance on euphemism «in natural

language is more akin to standard Arabic than to different varieties of colloquial Arabic because it is deeply rooted in the linguistic politeness manifested in careful speech» (p. 369). Thus, one could argue that the formality of language influences translation behavior, which means the high variety of Standard Arabic and its association with religion and the language of the Quran is perhaps one reason why dysphemism is more present in colloquial Arabic.

In example (6a), Marge is explaining to Homer what a colonoscopy is by saying ‘they stick a camera up your ah-ow’. Character divergence is worth noting here, even if very briefly. Contrary to Homer, Marge shows signs of moralism and conservatism, which she clearly reflects in her behavior and speech in varying degrees and which could reasonably justify her use of the innuendo ‘ah-ow’. In one of the translations, the term has been equivalently rendered as ‘منطقة’ [‘wawa’ area]. Using a similar innuendo to paraphrase the meaning in Arabic managed to compromise and convey the message without violating either the source text content or the target culture, and yet, the lexical addition of ‘area’ insinuates the anatomical nature of the utterance. The other two translations, on the other hand use ‘جزئك الخلفي’ [back side] and ‘أسفل جسمك’ [lower part] respectively, both of which discard the metaphoric façade by using fairly acceptable expressions in Arabic. Even when the participants de-euphemized the source utterance, the translations still present a level of conscious refrain from referencing the meaning directly.

Example (7a) is an explicit reference to what Marge called ‘ah-ow’. The doctor’s exclamation, ‘This ass is why I became a doctor’ is outright humorous because first, it is unexpected, and second, the visuals (the sparkling light effect) and diegetic music contribute to the effect. In terms of translation, the term has been entirely omitted in ‘كم أنا محظوظ!’ [how lucky I am!] and ‘هذا ما جعلني أدخل مهنة الطب’ [this is why I joined medicine]. As mentioned earlier, references to the private parts represent offensive content in the Arab culture, and such sanitizations establish linguistic politeness and decency. Therefore, in both instances, the taboo is maneuvered and mitigated by allowing the visuals to compensate for the loss. Likewise, the translation ‘إن هذا الجسم سبب أرغبني في أن أكون طبيباً’ [this body is what made me want to become a doctor!] lessens the obscenity of the taboo item by transitioning from

partial to whole. Remarkably, another translation directly transfers the meaning using the word 'المؤخرة' [ass/lit. rear], which the participant perhaps deemed acceptable to render given the scientific setting of the advert. All the above translations, however varying, are confined within the semantic scope of the original utterance, which is not always the case with the vernacular.

**Table 4** — Taboo language (vernacular)

Source Text	Target Text	Back Translation
(5b) You're having your <b>boobs embiggened</b> ?	<p>- حتسيبيني أسافر مع صحابي لوحدني؟</p> <p>- بتفكينا من مشاوير الجم؟</p> <p>- باش تريقل بدنك وتولي سفالت؟</p> <p>- هتفخي شفايفك ولا إيه؟</p> <p>- هو إنت قررت تنفخي صدرك؟</p>	<p>- You will let me travel alone with my friends?</p> <p>- You will relieve me from going to the gym?</p> <p>- You are going to tone up your body and become gorgeous?</p> <p>- You are going to (inflate) make your lips fuller?</p> <p>- You are going to (inflate) augment your chest?</p>
(6b) They stick a camera up <b>your ah-ow!</b>	<p>- يحطولك كاميرا غادي</p> <p>- بجيبوا كاميرا وبيدخلوها باللي بالي بالك</p> <p>- هايدخلوا الأتيوية في البوية</p>	<p>- They will put a camera there</p> <p>- They will get a camera and insert it in you know where</p> <p>- They will insert the tube in the hose</p>
(7b) <b>This ass</b> is why I became a doctor!	<p>- أووه شنو هذا! هذاكا علاش وليت طبيب</p> <p>- لعمي! لك أنا ما صرت دكتور إلا مشان شوف هالطيبون!</p> <p>- هي دي سبب سعدي.. يا عيني على بين القصرين</p>	<p>- Ooh! What is this? This is why I became a doctor</p> <p>- Damn! I only became a doctor to see this 'Tabun Oven'!</p> <p>- This is the cause of my happiness! How wonderful what's between the two castles!</p>

Looking at (5b; Table 4), the translations 'هتنفخي شفافك' [(inflate) make your lips fuller?], 'تتفخي صدرك' [(inflate) augment your chest?] and the Tunisian rendition 'باش تريقل بدنك وتولي سفالت' [you are going to tone up your body and become gorgeous?] are similar to the curtailed examples in (1a), though the rest demonstrate more creative skills. For example, 'حتسييني أسافر مع صحابي لوحدني' [you will let me travel alone with my friends?] demonstrates a positive cultural negotiation of the original dialogue via rewriting, something clearly inspired by ideological motivations. This is similarly perceived in 'بتفكينا من مشاوير' [you will relieve me from going to the gym?], which, again, employs the visual domain to augment the change, in this case, the participant is taking advantage of the bodily contrast between Homer and Marge to avoid the taboo. Furthermore, all the translations in example (6b) employ other expressions to avoid the taboo item. For instance, using the adverb 'غادي' [there] does not explicitly identify the item, rather it indirectly alludes to it. Another translation renders the message using the idiomatic expression 'اللي بالي بالك' [in you know where] to euphemistically circumvent the term. The expression itself is not limited to taboo issues as it can be used to refer to different concepts, objects, or people to evoke humor, maintain politeness, and in some cases, exclude specific participants from the communicative situation; however, the referent is always known between interlocutors. Analogously, 'الأنبوبة في الأنبوبة' [the tube in the hose] uses assonance and wordplay as linguistic resources of humor.

Moving to example (7b), while the translation 'أوه، شنو هذا! هذاكا' [Oh! What is this!? This is why I became a doctor] used demonstratives to evade direct referencing of the taboo word; the other two are exemplary transcreative renditions that portray an aspect of the participants' national identity. For instance, 'لعمة! لك أنا ما صرت دكتور إلا،' [Damn! I only became a doctor to see this 'Tabun Oven!'] uses Syrian culture-specific items. Using the term 'لعمة', which denotes –typically negative– astonishment, in tandem with 'هالطبون', which designates a clay oven in the shape of a truncated cone, provokes an equivalent comical effect. This figurative metonymy is built on the physical aspect of shape and thus, illustrates how two entities can be experientially and cognitively connected using visual associations. This is also discerned in the Egyptian rendition 'هي دي سبب سعدي، يا عيني على' [this is the cause of my happiness! How wonderful what's

between the two castles!], in which ‘بين القصرين’ refers to a district in Egypt where two Great Fatimid palaces were formerly constructed in the 10th century.

### Religious issues

I now turn to examine religious issues. The advert is an episodic emanation from *The Simpsons*, which is famous for its profuse religious humor and satirical sketches. Nevertheless, religion is a susceptible subject in Islamic societies, and any translation that violates the sanctity of religion is considered blasphemous and provocative. As Debbas and Haidar (2020) state, “followers of a particular religion do not tolerate mockery or disdain of their beliefs nor invading the sacredness of their religion” (p. 2). Consequently, the translator ought to be mindful of the ideological differences in peoples’ beliefs to accommodate the target values in the target translation. The adaptations in Table 5 display how target values are assimilated in translation.

**Table 5** — Religious references (MSA)

Source Text	Target Text	Back Translation
(8a) <b>Good Lord!</b>	يا إلهي! يا سلام!	- Oh my God! - Wow!
(9a) This is my <b>Sistine chapel!</b>	أصبح مكاني المفضل هذه نقطة ضعفي هذه هي كنيسة سيستينا إنه متنزهي	- This is my favorite place! - This is my weak spot! - This is the Sistine chapel! - This is my park!
(10a) <b>Hallelujah!</b>	لا لا لا لا لا الحمد لله، الحمد لله مرحى!	- Laalaalaaaa - Praise be to Allah - Hurray! - مرحى!

In example (8a), the proctologist uses the oath expression ‘Good Lord’ to convey his surprise at witnessing Homer’s rear. The capitalized term ‘Lord’ is a biblical reference to Jesus, who is considered the son of God in Christianity, a belief strongly repudiated in Islam. Hence, the MSA translations use paraphrased expressions such as ‘يا إلهي’ [oh my



**Table 6** — Religious references (vernacular)

Source Text	Target Text	Back Translation
(8b) <b>Good Lord!</b>	ايه ده؟ ايه اللي بيحصل دا يا نهار ابيض! لعمى!	- What is this?! - What's going on?! - My goodness! - Damn!
(9b) This is my <b>Sistine chapel!</b>	دي معجزة طبية هذا سبيطار ده حلم عمري هي دي سبب سعدي	- This is a medical miracle! - This is Charles Nichole hospital - This is the dream of my life - This is the cause of my happiness!
(10b) <b>Hallelujah!</b>	وان هلهنتي هلهنناك، دقينا البارود قبالك برشا برشا يا مدلل برشا برشا! والله وعملوها الرجالة هلا هلا هلا هلا ويل يا ويل! يا سلامم يا سلامم يا سلامم (زلاغيط).	- (Folkloric song) - - By God, the men did it - - - - Zagrouta (trilling cries of happiness)

As the above examples reveal, all religious references have been similarly neutralized, except they demonstrate more creative solutions that resonate deeply in the target culture. As example (8b) presents, participants used common Egyptian and Syrian expressions to signify astonishment, such as 'يا نهار ابيض' [my goodness!] and 'لعمى' [damn!], and once more, used demonstratives to indicate why the proctologist is surprised, which is seen in 'ايه ده' [what is this!/?] and 'ايه اللي بيحصل ده' [what is going on!/?]. Example (9b) shows how the religious attributions in 'Sistine Chapel' acquire medial overtones in translation by being rendered as 'دي معجزة طبية' [this is a medical miracle] and 'هذا سبيطار' [this is Charles Nichole hospital]. The second rendition, in particular, manifests the participant's aim to replace the religious item, which is, in essence, a building, with a famous hospital in the Tunisian culture. Others use Egyptian expressions like 'ده حلم عمري' [This is the dream of my life] and 'هي دي سبب سعدي' [this is the

cause of my happiness] to reproduce the humorous effect in a non-religious manner equally.

As Example (10b) exhibits, the religious connotations have been eliminated and replaced, for the most part, with musical intertextuality that substantiates the participant's cultural background. For example, one participant used 'وإن هلهلتي هلهلناك، دقينا البارود قبالك' which is a Syrian folkloric song often chanted at wedding ceremonies. Another participant used 'برشا برشا يا مدلل برشا برشا' which references a Tunisian hit song. A third participant used the Egyptian lyrics 'والله وعملوها الرجالة' [by God, the men did it] to dramatize the doctor's successful removal of the polyps. The remaining transcreations showcase the participants' reliance on culture-specific exclamations to replicate Homer's jubilation, such as the Khaliji 'يا سلامم يا سلامم' 'هلا هلا هلا' 'هلا أبوي، هلا هلا هلا' 'يا سلامم يا سلامم' and 'ويل يا ويل', the latter which is commonly used in traditional Arabic mawwāls. Needless to say, the underlying comical effect relies heavily on voice intonations as a strategic device to bring forth colloquial expressiveness. One participant, however, opted for the vocal sounds of 'ز لا غيط/ز غاريد' which are trilling cries of happiness women utter on ceremonial occasions.

## 5. Concluding remarks

Translating humorous hybrid texts is a challenging task due to its linguistic and/or cultural embeddedness that could possibly hinder the understanding of verbal or inferred humor. Another related factor is the cultural perception of humor and funniness –what is laughable in one culture might be offensive in another. Such implications necessitate creative translation skills to reach an adequate and appropriate compromise that serves the function. For a hybrid advert such as *Homer's Colonoscopy* that combines the triad of science, religion, and culture with humor, its dubbing into Arabic has proven to be a fertile ground for creative manipulation and intervention. An aspect that reflects the participants' positioning and attitude towards the source text, as well as their attempt to produce an equally humorous translation that serves the advert's function while remaining within the target culture's norms and values. In relation to language choice, the results clearly indicate that using MSA resulted in humor loss, whereas the

vernacular managed to convey the advert's function and humor in a nearly identical manner. Further examination of the varieties themselves suggests that Egyptian-Arabic was an ideal conduit to reproduce the humor, followed by the Qatari dialect and, lastly, the Tunisian dialect. However, this does not entail that those other dialects are altogether inviable; rather, it shows that some varieties (i.e., Egyptian) enjoy a universalized recognition that allows the transcreation to be accessible to a larger Arab audience.

### Conflict of interests

*The corresponding author has no conflict of interest to declare and bears full responsibility for the submission.*

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