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# Lost in subtitling: A case study of verbal humour in the Egyptian comedy film *Bittersweet*

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**Abstract:**

Subtitlers usually encounter several challenges on the lexical and grammatical levels. Moreover, when it comes to translating cultural aspects and even more humour of source language SL to the Target language TL, the translation challenges are higher. The analysis relies on the combination of two frameworks; The Conceptual Integration Theory (CIT) by Fauconnier & Turner (1998, 2002) and the Conceptual Blending Theory of Humour by Jabłońska-Hood (2015). Adopting both frameworks, the paper attempts to provide a qualitative analysis of verbal humorous extracts that emerge from mis/pronunciation and that result in the formation of new lexical item. The paper focuses on analysing how humour is triggered by single words, along with the particularities of transferring culturally marked humour in the subtitles from Arabic into English in the Egyptian film "Bittersweet", downloaded from the popular platform "Netflix". In addition, it attempts to identify the parameters that determine the choice of a particular strategy(s) when subtitling from Arabic as a SL to English as the TL and the extent to which they reflect and present the comic content to the non-native viewer. Situational humour is not part of the present study.

**Key words:** Conceptual Integration Theory, subtitling, pun, verbal humour, film discourse

**المستخلص:**

عادةً ما يواجه المترجمون العديد من التحديات على المستويات المعجمية والقواعدية. علاوة على ذلك، عندما يتعلق الأمر بترجمة الجوانب الثقافية والمزيد من روح الدعابة للغة المصدر SL إلى اللغة الهدف TL ، تكون تحديات الترجمة أعلى. يعتمد التحليل على مزيج من إطارين؛ نظرية التكامل المفاهيمي (CIT) بواسطة Turner & Fauconnier (1998 ، 2002) ونظرية المزج المفاهيمي للفكاهة بواسطة Jabłońska-Hood (2015). وباعتماد كلا الإطارين، تحاول الورقة تقديم تحليل نوعي للمقتطفات اللفظية الفكاهية التي تنشأ من سوء النطق والتي تؤدي إلى تكوين عنصر معجمي جديد. تركز الورقة البحثية على تحليل كيفية تحفيز الفكاهة من خلال الكلمات الفردية، إلى جانب خصوصيات نقل الفكاهة المرموقة ثقافيًا في الترجمة من العربية إلى الإنجليزية في الفيلم المصري "عسل اسود"، الذي تم تنزيله من منصة "Netflix" الشهيرة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يحاول الباحث تحديد المعلمات التي تحدد اختيار استراتيجية (استراتيجيات) معينة عند الترجمة من اللغة العربية كـ SL إلى اللغة الإنجليزية باعتبارها TL ومدى انعكاسها للمحتوى الهزلي وتقديمه إلى المشاهد غير الناطق بالعربية. دعابة الموقف ليست جزءًا من الدراسة الحالية.

## 1. Introduction:

Subtitling is a form of audio-visual translation (AVT). It is generally considered as a multimodal discourse which might require the analysis of the way meaning is communicated through multiple semiotic modalities. However, the current study focuses on the language used to express verbal humour, without allusion to the visual context, how humour is formed and how it is transmitted from the SL to the TL along with the strategies deployed for this transmission.

Humour is classified by humour theorists into either verbal or situational. Verbal humour has several subdivisions that include ambiguity, paronomasia, false etymologies, proverbs, literal interpretation of figurative expressions, allegory, metaphors, homonyms, synonyms, diminutive, paronyms and repetition. Situational humour, among other things, emerges from the unexpected, the possible yet inconsequential, the unconnected and incoherent discourse. Dynel (2013 b) added another two types of humour to the above classification to include nonverbal expression and (non-)parodic impersonation.

This study is based on investigating verbal humour and its transmission in the subtitles of the comedy film "Asal Aswad" or Bitter *sweet.* To guarantee the proficiency level of the subtitles, the film was downloaded from the most reputable platform "Netflix." The film is widely viewed and most popular Egyptian comedy and from which many clichés are exchanged among people in their daily interactions. Though comedy usually invokes laughter and pleasure, in the comedy film *Bitter Sweet*, laughter is mostly mingled with sorrow over the actuality.

The comic situations revolve around an Egyptian adult in his late twenties who has lived in The States for 20 years and was nostalgic to return to Egypt. He had plans of staying in Egypt, but upon encountering a lot of hardships, abuses, and mishaps, he decided to return to The States. Most of the extracts analysed in the study are taken from "Masry", the eponymous character in the film.

## 2. Aim of the study:

The study is multidisciplinary that aims at investigating the humour prevalent in the pronunciation of single words and how it is formed. As such, it can be considered as one of few studies on how mispronunciation can be humorous. Moreover, it investigates subtitles and the reasons why they fail to reflect the verbal humour presented in the film discourse.

## 3. <u>Methodology and data:</u>

The study is a case study of the Egyptian comedy film "Bittersweet" as broadcasted on the reliable platform "Netflix." It attempts a qualitative analysis of 25 comic extracts from the film. Due to space limitation, the analysis of the most prominent 13 extracts along with their Netflix subtitles, are presented in the current paper. Extracts with sound variations which lead to irrelevancies, or result in the creation of a pseudoword are selected, whereas those based on visual or situational irrelevancies are mostly avoided. Every Arabic extract is transcribed, followed by the English subtitle as presented by 'Netflix'.

## 4. <u>Research Questions:</u>

1. What is the cognitive mechanism involved in the formulation of humour?

2. What are the dominant strategies employed during subtitling humorous utterances from Arabic as a SL to English as a TL?

## 5. <u>Literature review and Theoretical framework:</u>

Several humour theories have developed over the decades. This section is concerned with providing a background of the most prominent linguistic theories of humour that play a crucial role within humour studies in general along with the theories that are used as a framework for the analysis of the data in this paper.

The General theory of verbal Humour (GTVH) was first presented by Attardo and Ruskin (1991) and developed later by Dynel (2013 b), and Attardo (2014) (2017). In his *General Theory of Verbal Humour*, Attardo (1994: 47) classified the theories of humour into three categories: "the cognitive which includes incongruity and contrast, the social which includes superiority and disparagement and finally the psychoanalytical

which includes sublimation, release, and liberation." According to Attardo (1994: 49 - 50), incongruity is based on "script opposition", on the mismatch between the normal or expected and the actual presentation of the object, event, or idea. "Incongruity theories are conceptually closer to linguistic theories of structuralist descent because they are essentialist." Morreall (2009: 12) further accentuates that "incongruity may be understood either as a mismatch stemming from the structural features of a stimulus or as a clash with expectations and mental patterns." Incongruity as stated by Morreall (2009:26) operates on the different levels of language whether with alliterating or rhyming sounds, juxtaposing ideas in semantics, violating language norms and rules in pragmatics, or mismatch between an utterance and its accompanying non-verbal expression.

Closely related to incongruity theory and neatly interwoven with it is the Disparagement and Superiority theory. It deals with the social aspect, thus falls within the domain of sociolinguistics. Morreall (2008: 234) observes that "most of the incongruities we laugh at, especially in comedy, are human shortcomings – ignorance, stupidity, awkwardness, mistakes, misunderstandings, and moral vices. The Incongruity Theory would say simply that it is the out-of-placedness of these shortcomings that we enjoy." The incongruity-resolution model may be combined with the superiority approach. At the heart of the superiority theory, humour stems from victimising, debasing or degrading a butt or target who is usually weak and misfortunate. "Also, superiority originates in one's realisation that one does not display the characteristics, such as stupidity or clumsiness, which the target does."

Finally, the sublimation/release theories "account for the "liberation" from the rules of language, typical of puns and other wordplay, and also for the infractions to the principle of Cooperation (Grice 1975, 1989) typical of humor at large." Morreall (2009:15) referred to it as a "relief theory" since it acts like a valve that releases emotional pressure that accumulates in the nerves. He asserted that the "Relief Theory arose alongside the Incongruity Theory to compete with the Superiority Theory." He further adds that the Relief theory is not only restricted to relieving accumulated emotions, but "Lots of playing with words also seems to be humour without relieving any pent-up emotions." (2009:20)

In *Developments in Linguistic humour theory,* Dynel (2013 b: ix) aims at extending the current theoretical scope, and at presenting new models and conceptualisations of humour. His goal is:

> to address new theoretical strands of research and notions in humour studies across linguistic disciplines against the backdrop of the multifarious scholarship, and to bring out the characteristics of humour with reference to theoretical models and phenomena not yet widely applied by humour researchers.

Archakis et al.(2010) adds that the context along with background knowledge aid in the interpretation of sociocultural assumptions that impact not only the production of humour but also its reception.

In Attardo's GTVH (2014), the knowledge resources for verbal humour are organised hierarchically on six parameters: script opposition, logical mechanism, situation, target, narrative strategy, and language. The employability of these parameters can vary from one instance to the other.
Script opposition means that two scripts must be at the same time overlapping and in opposition to each other. Logical mechanism refers to the mechanism through which the incongruity is revealed (e.g., through juxtaposition). Situation means that the humorous instance must be about something, i.e., a person, an object, a group etc. The target is/are the person(s) who are the butt of humour, a parameter that will be prominent in parody, for instance. The narrative strategy refers to the organisation of humour (e.g., working towards a punch line), which may be most prominent in verbal humour or jokes, but could in audio-visual texts, be expanded to include the organization of the four AVT modes, as Williamson and de Pedro Ricoy (2014: 168) suggest, since audio-visual humour may hinge on the interaction of visual–verbal, verbal–nonverbal, aural–verbal and aural–nonverbal information. Finally, language denotes the linguistic form the jokes take, i.e., choices "on the phonetic, phonological, morpho-phonemic, morphological, lexical, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels" (Asimakoulas 2004: 822–823).
From a pragmatic perspective, researchers interpret humour by means of the Relevance theory (RT) or by flouting of the maxims of conversation. Jabłońska-Hood (2015, p.138) asserts that "Whenever we encounter humour, we deal with some violated maxim of conversation." Attardo (1994, pp.276 -277) confirms that "the processing of a humorous text involves reaching an interpretive dead-end and backtracking in order to

find another interpretation to the text." He exhibited Sperber and Wilson's "mention theory" as an extension to the Gricean theory wherein humour is not viewed as a violation of maxims, but where any ironic utterance is echoing another previous utterance leading to humour. Xinyu and Wencheng (2019, p. 296) assert that "in humorous language, the speakers always choose the implied way to express their intentions so that the relevance is not stronger than in the assumed conversations. Hence, the interpreters need to spend more efforts to discover the relevance of utterances." Piskorska (2012) argues that humour can be reached through implicature or explicatures along with contextual and background knowledge common to interlocutors experiencing the humorous instances. Wilson's (2014) Echoic Theory, focused on the pragmatic study of irony with reference to humour theories.

The current study advocates the intersection of the Conceptual Integration Theory (CIT) by Fauconnier & Turner (1998, 2002) with the Conceptual Blending Theory of Humour by Jabłońska-Hood (2015). Both theories provide potent tools for humour analysis as they explain how the opposing associations are formed in the mental space. The analysis is further elaborated with a pragmatic and interdisciplinary twist which aid in the interpretation of the selected humour extracts and their subtitling.

Though apparently different from the above reviewed theories, the Conceptual Blending Theory of Humour shares with Attardo's GTVH the incongruity leading to humour. They are mainly based on the fact that there are two opposing principles, situations or events, whose contradiction leads to laughter.

According to Fauconnier & Turner (1998), CIT is based on four mental spaces which are defined as "small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action…. They are interconnected and can be modified as thought and discourse unfold." (1998, p. 139). The correspondences between the four mental spaces are complex and can be made comprehensive by information that does not only originate from the mental spaces but also from the local context. The elements in the different mental spaces are joined by connectors or networks. The network between the four mental spaces which aids in their elucidation, is referred to as "mappings." They are defined by (Fauconnier & Tunrner 1998: 133) as "a correspondence between two sets that assign to each element in the first a counterpart in the second." It

is mainly concerned with the concepts behind lexical items, along with the associations between them. They assert that "Mappings are culturally and lexically rooted; hence they lie at the heart of semantic comprehension, language interpretation and mental construction." (135)

Conceptual integration, referred to as "Blending," is a process wherein different mental spaces integrate. It is defined by Jabłońska-Hood (2015, p.17) as "a cognitive operation that involves two input mental spaces (or more), a generic space that maps onto the input spaces, and a fourth space called the blend."

The generic space includes the common structure, organisation and abstract elements that are shared by the input spaces. "The generic space contains what those two inputs have in common at any moment in the development of the conceptual integration network "(Fauconnier & Tunrner 1998, p. 141). The input spaces can be two or more; each is given a number to distinguish them from each other. The cross-space mappings chart the counterparts between two or more input spaces, where elements from one input space is related to another element from a second input space. The input spaces are later integrated revealing their incongruity in the fourth space which is the blend. Fauconnier & Tunrner 1998, p. 170) assert that:

> there are several vital conceptual relations that connect elements in mental spaces—Change, Identity, Time, Space, Cause-effect, Part whole, Representation, Role-Value, Analogy, Disanalogy, Property, Similarity, Category, Intentionality, Uniqueness—and under blending these vital conceptual relations can be compressed to create more powerful and efficient structure in the blend.

The resulting blend is structured on three stages, referred to by (Fauconnier & Tunrner 1998: 148) as the "emergent structure" of the blend. The first stage is the composition stage, which is the initial stage resulting from the integration of two or more inputs. The completion stage is the second stage, where the resulting blend is supported by background knowledge along with cultural and cognitive models. The third stage is the elaboration stage, where the blended structure is developed bringing about new meanings, connotations and extra semantic components that do not originate in the inputs but are rather achieved through the blend of information from the inputs. Fauconnier & Tunrner (1998, p.138) declare that "Blends are not predictable solely from the

structure of the inputs. Rather, they are highly motivated by such structure, in harmony with independently available background and contextual structure"

In *A conceptual Blending theory of humour,* Jabłońska-Hood (2015) builds on Fauconnier & Tunrner's theory and provides a comprehensive evaluation of the notion of humour from a linguistic, psychological, and philosophical perspectives. Within the linguistic theories on humour, Jabłońska-Hood examined Raskin's (1985) Semantic Script theory of Humour (SSTH) where Raskin applies Chomsky's Genertavism and asserts that native speakers and hearers possess what he termed a "humour competence." According to Ruskin (1985: 99-100) humour is based on the presence of two opposing scripts. He classified two types of scripts: the 'macro script,' where information is chronologically arranged, and 'complex script,' with no identified order. Scripts are connected via a semantic network of relations that include synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, prototypes, meronyms. Raskin's SSTH is later criticised by Attardo (1994) for its limitation to humour embodied in jokes. He concluded by stating that "none of the existing hypothesis is as yet ready to be labelled a general theory of humour." (154).

Basing his Conceptual Blending Theory of humour on Fauconnier & Tunrner Conceptual Integration Theory, Jabłońska-Hood (2015) asserts that humour results from the blending of two input spaces and a generic space. According to him, humour results from the incongruity that takes place in the blending space. The second input space is the space of the film where interactions take place. The two spaces are joined by an Access Principle to provide a typological relationship between them. (156) Jabłońska-Hood (2015, p.144) believes that "humour can be said to be based on the perception and resolution of the comic,"

## 6. <u>Subtitling:</u>
Subtitling, as a text form, functions as a great transmitter of cultural and linguistic attributes. Subtitles accompanying the audio-visual genre is usually supported by image and sound to deliver the message. Accordingly, the amount of information that needs to be transferred to the TL is inevitably reduced when compared to text translation. In addition, subtitles are constrained by the time and space of their appearance on the screen along with the processing effort required by the viewer to combine between reading and watching. Few studies have been made on the

translation of culture elements in general. Larsen (1993) and Overrall (2004) studied culture in audio-visual translation. Leppihalme's studied allusions and how they cause "culture bumps" (2000).

Cintas and Remael (2006), (2021), Pederson (2007), (2011) and Laurea (2013) propose an abundance of strategies and procedures to be adopted by subtitlers when rendering their translation from SL to TL. Cintas and Remael (2006) advocate the strategies of reformulation and text reduction. Pederson (2007) further classified three types of strategies based on Cintas and Remael's. The first requires slight changes when translating ST to TT and includes direct translation, official equivalence, and retention. The second group of strategies requires the intervention of the subtitlers by specifying through addition or completion, generalising, through paraphrasing or substitution of cultural terms by others that are more familiar to the TC. Omission is the last strategy that is employed when translating extralinguistic cultural reference (ECR). Laurea (2013:69) identifies two types of text reduction: "Total Reduction", relying on the omission strategy and "Partial Reduction", referring to the condensation and concise rendering of the ST. Familiarity with both SC and TC enables the subtitlers to decide on which information to reduce and which to omit. Cintas and Remael (2006: 150), assert that both reformulation and condensation occur at word and at clause level, due to the linguistic differences between languages.

The notion of culture-specific terms has been quite widely elaborated (Baker, 1992; Florin, 1993). Florin (1993:123) asserts that culture specific words refer to "words and combinations of words denoting objects and concepts characteristic of the way of life, the culture, the social and historical development of one nation and alien to another". Cultural reference (CR) is defined by Cintas and Remael (2021) as "references to items that are tied up with a community's culture, history or geography, and they can pose serious translation challenges. CRs are also referred to as *culture bound terms, realia, culture bumps* and, more recently, *culture specific references."*

The selected data includes abundance of what is termed by Pederson (2011: 43) as Extralinguistic Culture-bound Reference (ECR), and which he defined as:

> reference that is attempted by means of any culture-bound linguistic expression, which refers to an extralinguistic entity or process, and which is assumed to have a discourse referent that is identifiable to a relevant audience as this

referent is within the encyclopaedic knowledge of this audience.

Pederson distinguished three types of ECR: "monoculture", where the culture reference is restricted to one culture and its referent cannot be easily identified by the TC, thus it poses a translation problem. "Infraculture" deals with specifics within a SC that could even be alien to audience of this culture. Finally, "transculture" is the easiest ECR to translate due to its commonality among two or more cultures. Pederson argues that there are different strategies involved in transferring ECR from the SL to the TL. Subtitlers have a range of possible strategies at their disposal to render culture-bound references. They can either resort to "Foreignization" by maintaining the "foreign" essence of the film and leaving the cultural references unchanged, or to "domestication" by moulding the text around the target culture. These strategies are measured by a scale referred to as "Venutian scale" that ranges from the most foreignizing to the most domesticising. The subtitler is free to find humorous elements in similar situation in the target language where linguistic and cultural knowledge is required for humorous effect, without interfering with the visual sign system. This is quite evident in many animation films, where the humour is moulded to suit the TC and not simply a literal translation of the SC in a film.

According to Chaum (2018: 45) "The cultural turn in AVT has mostly generated case-studies focused on one film or on TV series in which the fingerprints of ideology captured researchers' attention, and in which the ideological reasons behind translation solutions are the focal point of interest."

Ranzato (2016:64) distinguished between real world cultural references and intertextual cultural references or allusion. The former refers to objects specific to a particular culture and not found in others. The latter is concerned with "the intertextual relationship created between two cultural texts, and the effect this relationship has on the audience." Intertextual allusions can be direct (a direct mention of *Hamlet* in a dialogue exchange) or indirect (a quote from *Hamlet* that the audience is required to identify).

To solve the problem of translating cultural references, in the absence of official equivalent, Pederson (2007: 37) introduced the translation strategy "cultural substitution," where he suggested replacing an item from the SC by a more familiar one to the TC. That is to replace the

eccentric ECR in the SC by a foreign ECR that could be common to the TC. The difficulty of using this strategy lies in the amount of research that needs to be done to find the cultural equivalent in the TC.

"Domestication" is another sub strategy of substitution, where, as stated by Pederson (2007), the ST is detached and substituted with a domestic one. He concludes that culture is more interchangeable in comedy than in other genres since "the breach of reference is not as important as the equivalence of effect." One case where there is no need to replace the cultural reference is when the target audience are familiar with the ECR found in the ST; what Pederson termed "transcultural ECR."

 Cintas and Remael (2021:210) highlighted the importance of the concept of centrality. They asserted that "The higher the degree of centrality of an ECR, e.g. to the narrative, the less liberties the translator will be able to take with the translation." Based on their earlier contribution in the subtitling field and those of other scholars, Cintas and Remael (2021) enhanced the strategies deployed by subtitlers to include: Loan, Literal translation, Calque, Explicitation, Substitution, Transposition, Lexical recreation, Compensation and Omission.

With loan, the word from the ST is repeated in the TT since both use the same word (e.g. Goulash/ hummus). With Literal translation, elements from the SL are rendered literally into the TL. Calque is a type of literal translation but limited to a word or phrase level. Cintas and Remael (2021: 215) assert that calques can respect the semantic structure of the SL. With the explicitation strategy, the subtitler tries to make the ST more accessible to the audience by either specification (hyponym), generalization (superordinate) or addition of extra information. Generalisation is the most common and addition is the least common due to space limitations in subtitles. With "substitution", a cultural reference in the ST is substituted by an already existing term in the TT. Moreover, "a cultural concept from one community is replaced by a cultural concept from another by employing the "Transposition" strategy. "Lexical creation" refers to the invention of a neologism by the ST speaker. This should be placed between quotation marks in the subtitle to indicate that it is not a typo. "Compensation" is the strategy where the subtitler makes up for the lack of translation in one exchange by extra elaboration in another. "Compensation can be a blessing for the translation of humour." Finally, "Omission" refers to the deletion of terms and expressions due to limitations of space and time.

## 7. <u>Subtitling Humour:</u>

In film discourse, humour is composed by a joint sender including the film production crew, characters' utterances, and actions, as well as events to amuse the recipient. (Dynel, 2013 a). Chiaro (2010, p.1) asserts that "As it crosses geographic boundaries humour has to come to terms with linguistic and cultural elements which are often only typical of the source culture from which it was produced thereby losing its power to amuse in the new location." Humour resulting from a joke is different from verbal humour based on sound variation. Piskorska (2012) views humour as a mechanism which may be arrived at via implicature or explicatures and with the assistance of context, a common ground is created with the hearer/audience who experiences a joke.

Chiaro (2014: 17) believes that several factors, including cognitive, emotional, social, and expressive, influence what to count as humorous and what as not. Cintas and Remael (2021: 213) assert that "Like poetry, humour is sometimes deemed untranslatable, but just like much poetry is read in translation, many comedies are watched with subtitles and travel successfully across linguistic borders." They define humour as "a form of communication which relies on a certain degree of common ground between the communicative parties in terms of linguistic and/or socio-cultural background and knowledge of the world." Because humour is a social event that is culturally bound, the challenge in subtitling it is even higher than subtitling ECR. Moreover, due to the huge gap between the Egyptian and the English language and culture, subtitling humorous utterances, in the current study, are expected to be even more challenging. Cintas and Remael (2021:215) distinguish three types of challenges that subtitlers face when translating humour. Language dependent humour, national or community-based humour and exoticism, and Audiovisual challenges. "The distinction between language and culture-based humour is not always clear-cut, just as the distinction between extralinguistic cultural references and linguistically embedded cultural references is not." Language and culture bound humour can be expressed visually or verbally. The current study focuses on the language bound humour, even if they are verbally entangled with cultural references.

Humour, like proper names, allusion, and culturally specific terms, requires a functional decision when translating it from the SC to the TC. Cintas and Remael (2021: 220) emphasise that "Subtitlers, like other translators and viewers, must therefore detect, interpret and understand

the functioning of humoristic instances in context before they can decide whether and how to translate them." They also (2021: 220) warn that failure of subtitlers to synchronise with the image and soundtrack and provide the humorous translation at the right time, might leave the viewer with a feeling that they missed something. They assert that

> Subtitling may be constrained by sound and image, but visually as well as aurally conveyed information can at times be of great help. Even if the universality of images is limited, a lot of film humour still relies on the semiotics of the image and can work through the incongruous juxtaposition of images or through the comical gestures and facial expressions of the speakers.

Thus, producing and interpreting humour is not only related to language expression, but also depends on common knowledge, contextual situation, and background information. Xinyu &Wencheng (2019:293) argue that "humour is not one-side activity but a process of interaction with cognition."

## 8. <u>Analysis:</u>
### 8.1 Humour based on Sound Variations:

The majority of comic reliefs in the film are found to stem from variations in sounds. Humour resulting from sound change can either be phonetic change that involves the replacement of one speech sound or, more generally, one phonetic feature value, by a different one, or a phonological change involving change in the patterning of speech sounds that exist in one language but not in the other, such as the merger of two sounds or the creation of a new sound. In one of the most famous extracts, humour results from creating a voiced-voiceless continua for words like *fibration/ vibration, fery much/ very much, fikings/ Vikings,and the proper noun Merfet/Mervat.* For ease of articulation, the Egyptian English teacher replaced the voiced /v/ in the above words, which does not exist in the Arabic language, by the voiceless /f/. The situation would not have been humorous to the general Arabic speakers who cannot naturally distinguish the two sounds. However, by having the eponymous character comment and correct the pronunciation, humour arises. Humour is also evoked in the same situation from the phonological patterning in the word */kilas/* as opposed to */klas/.* Transforming the correct pronunciation of the English word */klas/* to fit the Arabic phonological patterning of CVCVC in */kilas/*, evoked humour. Again, the comic relief would have gone unnoticed as comic, by the majority of Arabic speakers, had not the protagonist highlighted and compared the difference.

**Extract 1:**

The situation is on the airplane from The States to Egypt. 'Masry,' the main character, code-switching between Arabic and English, is conversing with the traveller sitting next to him on the plane.

مصري: *My dad*
حاكلي عنها كثير
هو ميت دلوقي *But you know,*
رفيق السفر: الله يرحمه
مصري: يرحمكم الله
*May he rest in peace*
*Thank you*

Based on Fauconnier & Tunrner's (1998) framework, a distinction is made between two input spaces and a generic space. Within the generic space, there are 2 persons and an activity of conversation. Input space one is the mental space of the situation where a person dies, another person expresses sorrow and condole by the phrase "Allah yerhamoh" [May God rest his soul in peace]. The second input space is the mental space where someone sneezes and another person consulates by saying "Yarhamkon Allah" [bless you]. The humour is centred on the sound resemblances between the phrase used for paying condolences /alah jerhamɔh/ and the phrase used for consoling a sneezing person /jarhmkɔm alah/ along with juxtaposing the constituents of the phrases. This in turn leads to the violation of the relevance maxim where the response to input 1 would be "amen" and the response provided in input 2 is relevant to an actual sneeze. The blend in the extract results from the incongruity between situation 1 (condoling the death of a person) and situation 2 (response to a sneeze). Accordingly, miscommunication occurs leaving a comic effect. Fauconnier & Turner (1998, p.27) argue that "Clearly, different people using the same words in the same language may nevertheless entertain different categorization schemes."

The subtitling provided to the extract maintains the relevance maxim by translating "Yarhamkon Allah" [bless you] to "thank you" thus missing on the humour in the Arabic speech. The missing fun in the subtitle is due to cultural background where Masry responded to his partner's condolences for the death of his father by saying 'may he rest in peace' by an irrelevant answer which is given in another context where someone sneezes. This provokes laughter to the native Arabic speaker, but the

subtitler failed to render it in the subtitle and replaced it with "thank you" which did not leave the same effect on the non-native viewer.

**Extract 2:**

ومبسوط بقي جدا عشان هحضر الكام يوم دول الي فاضلين في رمضان و الإفطار والتسحر
*You know*

*I'm very happy because I'll experience the last few days of Ramadan.*
 *The fasting and predawn meals, you know?*

Another instance where the sound resemblances trigger humour is seen in juxtaposing sounds in the two words /tesʌhɔr/ and /sɔhu:r/, both distinct lexical items in the Arabic language. The generic space includes Masry and the driver picking him from the airport performing the activity of conversing on their way to their destination. In input space 1is the mental space provided by using the word "tasahor" where there is a barren land with no plantation, literally translated as "desertification." In input space 2 is the mental space of the Muslim event of Ramadan where one of the meals /sɔhu:r/, literally subtitled as (predawn meal), has sound resemblances to the Arabic word /tesʌhɔr/. The latter performed based on a derivational pattern in Arabic, where the prefix /te/ means cause/lead to. However, the /te/ in the word /tesʌhɔr/ is not a prefix but part of the root of the word. The blend occurs because of the incongruity between the two words and their usages. The comic effect is attained by the incongruity resulting from using the word /tesʌhɔr/, which is alien to the context of having the predawn meal /sɔhu:r/ in Ramadan.

To avoid the irrelevance that will result from translating the word /tesʌhɔr/, the subtitler resorted to the literal translation of the non-spoken, yet relevant, term /sɔhu:r/. Thus, the subtitler failed to render the subtitle as funny.

**Extract 3**

رفيق السفر: بس انت بتتكلم مصري كويس اوي
مصري: علشان الأفلام والمتسلسلات المصريه. بتفرج عليها كل شويه

*Traveller's companion: Your Egyptian dialect is very good.*
*Masrey: it's all thanks to Egyptian movies and TV series.*
        *I watch them every now and then when I'm there.*

The humour in this scene is centered on mispronunciation. The confused words /mɔselselat/ & /mɔtaselselat/ exist in the Arabic language. However, they are used in different contexts. The former referring to TV series, whereas the latter has the meaning of consecutives. Due to phonetic similarity between the two words /mɔselselat/ & /mɔtaselselat/ مسلسلات متسلسلات and the incorrect addition of a syllable to the correct word provided another word which left a comic effect on the native

viewer. Again, the humour is missing in the subtitle, since if literally provided will result in irrelevance. The generic space includes the two persons performing the activity of conversing on the airplane. Blending the mental space of the first input of watching series on TV and how the act of watching improves the language, with the second mental space of consecutive items not related to the activity of TV watching resulted in the incongruity that led to the comic effect. The ambiguity encountered upon using the word /mɔtaselselat/instead of /mɔselselat/ justifies the humour.

**Extract 4:**

مصري: والعربية بتاعتك دي سيدان اور فان؟

السائق: ايه الثانية دي؟

مصري: فان اللي هي العربية اللي ليها الباب اللي تبعته يقوم يرجعلك ثاني.

السائق: ابعثه ويرجع ثاني وايده فاضيه؟ ده باب ايه ده؟

مصري: باب اللي هو باب فرار

السائق: قصدك جرار........

السائق: فرار ده ولا مش فرار

مصري: يا فعلا بيفرفر

*Masry: and is your car a Sedan or van?*

*Driver: what's the other one?*

*Masry: Van*

*Van, a car with a door that you send away and then it comes back to you*

*Driver: I send it and it comes back empty-handed? What kind of door is that?*

*Masry : A door …. An escaping door*

*Driver: escaping?*

*Masry: yes.*

*Driver: You mean a sliding door.*

*Masry: Yes, sliding…*

*Driver: This is it. Is it an escaping door or not?*

*Masry: yes, it is escaping, okay.*

*I should've been more accurate.*

The above extract is loaded by three comic instances. It can be viewed as a complex cognitive blend, where one blend builds upon the next. The fun is evoked by the minimal pairs /farar/ and /garar/ to refer to the car's sliding door. The first mental space of input one includes an element of escaping; something that runs away upon encountering danger. The

second mental space of input 2, refers to the normal sliding movement of the door. By using the first instead of the second, laughter is evoked by the actor's mispronunciation.

The second incongruity results from blending the mental space of input 2, which now became input 1 in the new blend and mental space of input 2. An additional association, which does not stem from the blend's novel relationship is brought to the scene. The first mental space includes the escaping entity that contrasts with the mental space of input 2 /bejfarfar/, a verb referring to a dying person. By using sound alliteration between the two words, the comic effect is communicated.

The phrase ابعثه ويرجع ثاني وايده فاضيه؟ similarly evokes laughter for native speaker, based on the cultural background that any person who visits a host's dwelling, should bring a sort of gift in his/her hand out of etiquette and they could be criticised stealthily if they entered the house 'empty handed.' The subtitle *and it comes back empty-handed* referring to the door of the car, is totally meaningless to a foreign viewer and does not communicate the humorous meaning. Ending the excerpt by يا يا فعلا بيفرفر evokes laughter to native speakers through the play on the word 'farar' and 'bifarfar' where the first means 'have the capability of escaping', the second is cultural specific referring to 'someone who is in his/her last breaths and about to die'.

The subtitle completely avoided the accurate translation and stuck to the literal meaning which is not funny for foreign viewers. Moreover, the literal translation of ابعثه ويرجع ثاني وايده فاضيه*x*by *and it comes back empty-handed* does not only miss the humour, but the irrelevance as well.

**<u>Extract 5:</u>**

Instances where humour results from using minimal pairs along with background knowledge is evident in:

مصري: ده فول بالصوص؟

السائق: اه فول بالسوس

*Masry: It's with sauce, right?*
*Driver: Yes, with sauce.*

The generic space includes persons, food, background knowledge. The mental space in input 1 includes beans, sauce where the beans are emersed, sharing food and a sense of satisfaction. The second mental space includes beans damaged by bruchus, a sense of disgust and illness resulting from eating it. The incongruity resulting from blending the semantic meaning of the two words, along with background knowledge, gave rise to the humour.

Again, the subtitle fails to communicate the humour embedded in the sound alliteration where the driver's mispronunciation of the English

word 'sauce' /sause/ and repeating it as the Arabic word 'سوس' /sus/ meaning 'bruchus' causing laughter based on the background knowledge that the majority of the beans in market is not of good quality and it contains 'bruchus.'

**Extract 6:**

مصري: علي فكره انت المفروض مش يسموك راضي يسموك واطي.

راضي: واطي؟

*Masry: By the way, your name shouldn't be Radi, it should be Wati*
*Radi: Low?*
*Masry: Yes, low!*

Replacing the /r/ by /w/ provided a minimal pair that altered the meaning. The first mental space includes the meaning behind the name /radi/ as a person who is satisfied and grateful for what he gets. The second mental space is provoked using the minimal pair /wati/ with a person abusing the situation. The blend resulted from the incongruity between the two terms leaving a humorous effect on the viewer. Though a negative adjective, the subtitler capitalised the word "Wati" presenting it as a proper now. Upon repetition of the word, s/he provided the literal translation for the adjective meaning "low." Humour is not only lost in the subtitle, but irrelevance is also created leading to miscommunication of ideas.

**Extract 7:**

Another instance where humour resulted from sound alliteration is evident in the situation:

سعيد: شفت المدرسه بقت حلوه ايزاي بعد ما جددوها

مصري: جددوها؟ قصدك هببوها

What triggers humour in the above situation is the two rhyming yet contrasting words /gedǝduha/ meaning "renewed it" and /hebǝbuha/ meaning "covered it with soot" referring to the current state of the school. The generic space includes 2 people, a situation, and an activity of conversing. The first mental space is that of the renewed, updated state of the school from the perspective of one person, is incongruent with the second mental space of the school being covered in soot from the perspective of the other. The incongruity between the two mental spaces formed the blend that lead to laughter.

**2. Humour based on pseudowords:**

Some humour instances in the film are based on absurd or nonsense words. This aspect of humour has not been dealt with by humour theorist. This could be attributed to the fact that this type of humour is confined to

Arabic, more specifically, Egyptian humour. A pseudoword is defined as "a unit of speech or text that appears to be an actual word in a certain language, while in fact it has no meaning in the lexicon." It is a kind of non-lexical vocabulary.

**Extract 8:**

راضي: ده انا لسه مطلعك من القسم

مصري: ايوه بعد ايه بقي؟ بعد مااستب ...بعد مااستب.. بعد مااستب... بعد ما استبزتني انت مستبز

*Rady: I just got you out of the station!*

*Masry: Yes, but after what?*

*After you've blackmailed me, okay!*

*You're a blackmailer*

Humour is triggered by Masry's repeated trial to recall the Arabic alternative for the word "blackmailer" that is used in this situation and ended up using the word /mɔstabez/ confusing it with the minimal pair /mɔstafez/ "provocative". The former does not exist in the Arabic language as an adjective though the verb is more in use ebtaz/yastabez. However, the latter exists as an adjective. So Masry describes the driver as a blackmailer by blending the two words "mostabez" and "mostafez." This form of verbal humour carries an indirect insinuation that is signalling an alternative meaning.

The generic space includes people, situation, and activity. The first mental space is that of two people one in dire need of help, the latter takes advantage of the situation and demands huge amount of money in return. In the second mental space, a particular lexical representation is activated through the use of the pseudoword "mostabez.," having an indirect reference to a woman's breast. The incongruity between the two mental spaces leads to the blend that is composed, completed, and elaborated leading to laughter. Due to the impossibility to present the incongruity between the two mental spaces in the limited space and time of the subtitle, the subtitler is left with the decision to translate the literal meaning in the first mental space only as "blackmailing," leaving the humour behind.

Humour is again lost in the subtitle due to the ambiguity inherent in the word "mostabez." Though the phonemes used to compose the word conform to the Arabic language phonotactic rules, they resulted in the creation of a pseudoword or non-word, that does not mention anything overtly and that displays no detachment between the speaker and his utterance. Yang (2003), asserts that "humour can also be produced in terms of reader's imagination and association during the process by

which the lexical grammar and the rhetorical devices provide a new meaning on the basis of the conventional word."

**Extract 9:**
The scene is on iftar table in the holy, month of Ramadan. Masry is handled a jug of the famous drink in this month /xɔʃaf/. As usual his mispronunciation by exchanging sounds in the same word / ʃɔxaf/ triggered laughter.

مصري: واو ايه ده؟ مش ده شوخاف؟ (خوشاف)

سعيد: اسمه خشاف. ده ولا من خشاف ولا من دري.

*Masry: Wow! What is this? Is it shokhaf*
*Saaed: shokhaf? It is called khoshaf (missing subtitle)*
*Mounes: yes of course. Take it all. No one will want to drink it after what you called it.*

The metathesis between the two words /xɔʃaf/ & / ʃɔxaf/ is what triggered the humour in the above situation. Metathesis is defined by Nordquist (2019) as the process "when two sounds or syllables switch places in a word." Though metathesis is usually a slip of the tongue, in the current scene, it is intentionally performed to create a pseudoword that has indirect link to an already existing word with the aim of triggering laughter. The humour focuses on the word /ʃɔxaf/. The generic space includes people, dining table, event. The input of the first mental space includes the jug of the popular juice with its yellowish colour. The input of the second mental space includes the association provided once the word was mispronounced which is that of a toilet with urine. The incongruity between the dining table and the toilet, the juice and the urine led to the blend which is composed, completed, and elaborated upon by the family members' rejection to drink it after hearing the Masry's mispronunciation. Hence the comic effect is reinforced.

The subtitler confined him/herself to providing pronunciation correction made by the speaker at the dinner table. Replacing the sound /xɔʃ/ in word initial position by the sound /ʃɔx/ triggered the association to a word closely related to the translation of the English word "urine." The fun is missed in the subtitle due to the literal translation which leaves the non-native viewer missing a lot of meaning. Moreover, relevance is lacking in the subtitle as the non-native viewer cannot possibly explain why "No one will want to drink it after what you called it."

## 8.3 Humour based on ECR

### Extract 10:

Trying to remove the ink of the newspaper from his stained hands after reading an article about a fire that took place in Giza.

رفيق السفر: في ايه ياعم؟

مصري: حريقه

رفيق السفر: طب طفيها ياعم

مصري: مش عارف واضح انه من الحريقه

رفيق السفر: حريقه ( بتهكم)

طب طفيها بقي علشان عاوز انام

*Traveller: what happened?*
*Masry: I don't know.*
*This must be due to the fire*
*Traveller: (sarcastically) Fire?*
*Masry: Yes*
*Traveller: Put it out, I want to sleep*
*Masry: Okay.*

Though the subtitle provides literal translation, the humour is lost. To make sense of the comedy, the viewer needs to make a cognitive projection on the background cultural knowledge that reading some Egyptian newspaper, is more likely to leave ink traces on the finger similar to fire ashes. The connection to the fire is made based on the newspaper headline which states that there is a massive fire in the Egyptian governate "Giza.", and for which the subtitle did not present a translation. Thus, part of the information presented to the native speaker is hidden from the non-native viewer. The subtitler failed to present the comic effect to the non-native viewer since the content of the headline which includes the word "fire" and upon which the humour is built was not communicated.

The generic space includes people, activity, cultural background and two input spaces. The first mental space includes reading the word "fire" in the Egyptian newspaper which contrasts with actual fire in the second mental space. Similarly, traces of ink in the first mental space contrasts with ashes on the hands resulting from a real fire in the second mental space. Finally, the shock upon seeing the black fingers in the first mental space, contrasts with that upon encountering a real fire. The incompatible nature of the two spaces is brought together by the principle of blending causing humour.

## Extract 11:

The situation taking place in the police station after the arrest of the main character Masry taking photos of the Nile without legal permission. As a retribution, the police officer deleted all the photos from Masry's camera, an act that provoked Masry, who started arguing with the officer.

ضابط الشرطة: (بانفعل) وانا ضابط مصري والقانون بيديني الحق لما اشك في واحد اقبض عليه واتحري عنه و اتخذ اللازم معاه

ولو طلع مجرم انفخه .

مصري:اوكيه... وانا طلعت مش مجرم واتنفخت

تقدر تقول لي انت هتعمل ايه دلوقتي؟ هه؟

هتقسيني؟ اتفضل فسي

متفسي

ضابط البوليس: حاضر. يامنعم!

مصري: خلاص انا هفسي لوحدي

*Police officer: I'm an Egyptian officer! the law grants me the right, when I suspect someone, to arrest him, investigate, and do what needs to be done.*

*And if it turns out he's a criminal, I burn him!*

*Masry: Okay. I turned out I'm no criminal and I still got burned.*

*What will you do next? Will you un-burn me? Okay do it.*

*Police officer: Menhem!*

*Masry: No. okay.*

*I'll un-burn me.*

Unlike analysing single fragments extracted form scenes, the whole investigation scene is analysed leading to a fairly complex network of mental spaces.

The generic space in the above extract includes persons, place and activity. The first input space includes Masry the main character, a police investigator, a surgent, a police station, investigation with typical questioning, accusations, and denial of accusation. The second input space, provoked by the investigator's use of the slang term / ənfʌxɔh/ meaning treating someone harshly and giving him/her a hard time, includes a balloon being inflated and deflated along with the person performing the activity. It triggered the mental image of a balloon where the same term is literally used for blowing the balloon and filling it with air. The humorous meaning is created in the blended space due to the unusual combination of related meaning, which results in incongruity.

Upon proving his innocence, Masry objected by asking for a compensation for the maltreatment he received. He used the same term

/hatfasini/, to question the type of retribution he will get, literally referred to as the act of deflating the balloon. Masry moved from the first mental space of the police station and their harsh treatment to the balloon space of deflating. Moreover, the word itself has a further connotation referring to performing the biological act of emitting wind from the anus. Thus, creating a third mental space with digestion problem and emitting gastric gases as a way of resolving this problem. This space is further enhanced by the order given by Masry to the investigator /fasi/ and further repeated as /matfasi/ given with impatience and meaning emit gastric gasses, which is the third mental space.

The emergent novel structure resulting from the incongruity among the three cognitive spaces composed the blend that is completed and elaborated on, leading to the comic effect that is impossible to project in the subtitle. Apart from the fact that the humour is totally lost in subtitling the above scene, the meaning is distorted by using phrases that do not even exist in the language: "un-burn me," "I'll un-burn me" leaving the non-native viewer perplexed.

## 8.4 Humour based on Pun:

The most common of verbal humour is pun or play on words, where a word with similar sounds can have more than one meaning. When a pun is well-formed, it leads to semantic overlap. Hempelmann & Samson (2007:200) assert that "in verbal punning, there is in principle a dissociation between the sound level of the signifier and the semantic level of the signified."

Many translators and linguists believe in the possibility of translating puns from the source language to the target language. Laurian (1992) asserts that "Actually a good translator may be able to find similarities in the two linguistic systems that will allow the rendering of the pun in another language with a minimum of distortion." Attardo (1994 p: 29) objects by stating that translating puns is of utmost difficulty due to the fact that puns associate two identical signifiers to two different signified and every language articulates the signified differently. What adds to the difficulty of subtitling puns in films is the space limitation to explain the two signified referred to by a single signifier.

The first and most important pun running throughout the film is the word "Masry," meaning "Egyptian."  It is used in the film as a proper noun referring to the main character, but an additional connotation is brought to

various scenes when used as an adjective to evoke laughter through sarcasm on the situation in Egypt and the sufferings faced by Egyptians.

**Extract 12**

Saaeed handling Masry his dead father's night dress /jelbab/ so Masry can put on and sleep in.

سعيد: دي جلابيه ابويه. هتريحك.

مصري: هتريحني زي ما ريحتة؟

*Saeed: This is my dad's jellbab. May his soul rest in peace. It will make you comfortable.*

*Masry: like it made him comfortable?*

The pun in this situation is triggered by the word /hetrejaħk/, /hetrejaħni/ and /rejaħetəu/. The first and second meaning "make you/me comfortable," the third has the non-literal meaning of being relieved from the sufferings of life by "being dead". The generic space includes people, situation, and activity. The first input includes the mental space of a dress, a feeling of comfort, someone to wear the dress. The second input includes the mental space of death, comfort from life problems by death, a dead person. The incongruity between the comfort provided by the dress and the comfort provided by death composed the blend that led to the comic effect.

The literal translation for /rejaħetəu/, and its relation to death, by the phrase "make someone comfortable" led to the unhumorous effect in the subtitle. Again, due to space and time limitations of the subtitle, the cultural knowledge is lacking and leaving the non-native viewer with a neutral reaction to the situation.

**Extract 13:**

Sleeping next to Saeed, Masry has his face close to Saeed's feet.

مصري: رجلك كبرت اوي ياسعيد

سعيد: ماهو من القاعده

مصري: لا الثانيه دي كبيره من يومها

*Masry: your leg has become so big.*

*Saaed: What? It's because I stay seated all the time.*

*Masry: no, the other one has always been big*

The pun in the above situation is created upon using the word /Ɂ ʕda/. The generic space includes people, situation, and activity. The first input refers to the mental space of a person, not doing much in life due to lack of work and seated most of the day. It contrasts with the second mental space of the round fleshy bottom on which someone sits. The blend created from the incongruity between the two meanings of the word /Ɂ

ʕda/, led to the humorous effect that is missing in the subtitle since the non-native viewer cannot interpret what the "other one" refers to.

## 9. Conclusion:

The paper is a case study of humour in the Egyptian film "Bittersweet" and its subtitling after downloading it from the reputable platform, 'Netflix'. Humour results from either verbal or the situational occurrences. The fun resulting from the latter is usually based on unexpected events. Whereas the fun resulting from the former is due to the contrast between variations in the elocution and the original ones. The current paper investigated the humour that is inherent in verbal interactions, namely humour at the word level that is mainly not supported by a visual context.

After providing a theoretical background to the different theories on humour, the paper adopts the Conceptual Integration Theory (CIT) by Fauconnier & Turner (1998, 2002) and the Conceptual Blending Theory of Humour by Jabłońska-Hood (2015) to explain how humour occurs at the word level, and to answer the question why the subtitles fail to communicate the humour. Using the (CIT) to analyse some humorous cinematic scenes proves, as stated by Jabłońska-Hood (2015, p. 207) that "blending and mental spaces allow for the description of humour in a consistent manner."

It was found that most of the comic effects are not founded on situations, but more on ECR, sound variations, puns, and pseudowords. Since Arabic and English are unrelated languages, the subtitling of the above features is found to be impossible. Two subtitling strategies are adopted by the subtitlers and that led to the loss of humour. First, the omission strategy, where the humorous instance is totally absent from the subtitle. The second is providing literal translation to the ambiguous meaning. Two factors are found to be responsible for the difficulty of subtitling humour in the film. First is the fact that the humour inherent in the word usage does not depend on the visual system for comic effect, since there is no direct reference to whatever is showing on the screen, and even when there is reference to a written word on the screen, the subtitler fails to communicate it. Second, by explaining how humour operates using the Conceptual Blending Theory of Humour, it became evident that communicating the incongruity resulting from the blend of two or more input spaces is impossible to present in the constrained space and time of

the subtitle. The ineffectual subtitles do not only result in the humour being missed, but also in the distortion of meaning.

It can be concluded that aural humour in film discourse falls outside the remit of subtitlers. Humour centered on mispronunciation, whether due to sound variations or to metathesis, and those centered on puns stimulate simultaneous access to two different meanings, which are difficult to present in the subtitle. Similarly, the emergence of several pseudowords in the film evoked laughter that is untranslatable in the subtitle. Moreover, other humour instances relating to ECR are based on incongruity and its resolution that cannot be provided in the limited space for subtitling.

The current paper can serve as a guidance for further research in the different disciplines of humour studies, translation, and subtitling.

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