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Media Accessibility of Taboo in Arabic: The Analysis of a Political Film

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Abstract

Research and practice on subtitling for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (SDH), Audio description (AD) in Arabic, and Arabic Sign Language (ArSL) remain scant, with only a few studies conducted to date and an equally low number of titles with Arabic AD and SDH available on on-demand platforms. Language professionals in the Arabic-speaking world often face challenges in adapting international standards or guidelines to meet the unique linguistic and cultural needs of Arabic-speaking audiences, so more research is needed with a variety of audiences to understand user preferences and expectations.

This article investigates the accessibility of taboo in Arabic, SDH, AD, and ArSL, drawing from the AD, ArSL, and SDH in Arabic and English developed by students in the Master's in Audiovisual Translation program at Hamad bin Khalifa University for a film screened at a festival in Qatar in November 2023. The film, *200 Meters*, set in occupied Palestine, contains taboo language that needed to be mediated, especially given the conservative nature of the Qatari society. Likewise, the film's political nature compelled subtitlers and describers to make choices that inevitably reveal a certain political stance. This article explores the choices made for the subtitles, sign language interpretation, and audio description of the film, and their implications,

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reflecting on the fact that SDH and AD can be a political act. It is hoped that this study will serve as a basis for further research in Arabic AD and as a contribution to the development of guidelines for Arabic AD.

Key words: accessibility, Arabic, Arabic sign language, audio description, subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing, taboo.

Introduction

The accessibility of media for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing audiences, visually impaired, and sign language users in Arabic-speaking contexts is an area that has received limited attention in research and practice. Despite the growing demand for accessible media worldwide, Arabic-language accessibility solutions remain scarce. The lack of research on this makes it impossible to fully understand the challenges faced by professionals when trying to adhere to international standards and guidelines, but in our experience as instructors, researchers and practitioners of audiovisual translation, adhering to international standards and guidelines is often challenging, given the distinct linguistic, cultural, and social nuances of Arabic. There is also little research on media accessibility in Arabic (Jimenez-Andres & El-Taweel, forthcoming; El-Taweel, 2025). These gaps in research and practice highlights the need for more localised studies that address the expectations and preferences of diverse Arabic-speaking audiences, ultimately informing the development of culturally and linguistically appropriate guidelines for Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (SDH), Audio description (AD), and Arabic Sign Language Interpreting (ArSL) in the region.

In this paper, we investigate how taboo language is managed in Arabic media accessibility, focusing on the case متر 200 [*200 Meters*] (Nayfeh, 2020), a film screened at a festival in Qatar in November 2023. The film, set in the occupied Palestinian city of Tulkarm, contains sensitive political and cultural content that presents particular challenges for translators, describers, and sign language interpreters. Given the conservative nature of Qatari society, the film's taboo language and political themes, which are considered sensitive or taboo in certain cultures or political regimes and subject to censorship (Billiani, 2007), required careful consideration in subtitling, audio description, and sign language interpretation. By analysing the decisions made during the creation of the Arabic AD, SDH, and ArSL for this film, we explore the complex intersection of language, culture, and politics in accessibility practices, with the aim of contributing to the nascent but growing research on media accessibility in Arabic.

The next section provides an overview of the literature on media accessibility (MA), with a particular focus on its application to the Arabic language. It also reviews research on the treatment of taboo content in media accessibility, highlighting how it is typically addressed across different modes. The study and its findings are then discussed.

1. Media Accessibility in Arabic

1.1. Arabic Audio Description

In the last five years, there has been an increase in research and development in AD focusing on Arabic-language content and the distinct challenges it presents (Jimenez-Andres & El-Taweel, forthcoming). While there is no research study to date focusing on the AD of taboo in Arabic, research has been conducted on script writing, preferences regarding regional Arabic varieties, and audience reception of specific AD strategies. A detailed review of research and practice in Arabic AD can be found in Jimenez-Andres and El-Taweel (forthcoming); however, in the context of this article, a few studies are worth mentioning.

Because AD has a longer history in other languages, Arab researchers have primarily adopted and localised practices and guidelines developed for European languages, such as English or Spanish (Rai et al., 2010; Remael et al., 2015). However, due to the unique cultural and linguistic characteristics of Arabic, strict adherence to these existing guidelines is often impractical – an example being the recommendation that the AD "should reflect the predominant accent in the program" (Netflix, 2024). AD is commonly offered in MSA, even though film dialogues are most often produced in a regional, spoken, colloquial variety of Arabic. It is thus not surprising to find practitioners and researchers advocating for the development of AD guidelines specifically tailored to the Arabic context (Jimenez-Andres & El-Taweel, forthcoming; E-Taweel, 2025).

To date, only two reception studies have examined AD with blind audiences in the Arab world. Alnatsheh (2020) compared MSA and Qatari colloquial Arabic in the AD of a Qatari film, finding a preference for MSA despite greater enjoyment of the colloquial version. A second, larger-scale study by Darwish et al. (2022) evaluated a mixed MSA/Jordanian AD for a Netflix series, revealing high overall satisfaction but also participant confusion by the combination of the two varieties of Arabic and perceived meaning loss, underscoring the complexities of dialectal variation in AD.

AD services in the Middle East follow a trend similar to that observed in broader research: while their availability has recently increased, largely due to initiatives from streaming services aimed at improving accessibility, we are still far from 100% provision. In streaming platforms, Arabic AD has only been available over the last two years and only on some of Netflix's Arabic productions. In cinemas, provision is even poorer. In Qatar, for example, the only films shown with AD in cinemas come to us in the context of the "Inclusive Screening" at the Ajyal Film Festival, held annually. Masreya Media is also a leading a localisation company in the region that, according to their website, has been providing AD for Arabic movies since 2015, and Youssef Chahine's Saladin, and the 2015 International Children's Film Festival (Masreya Media, 2021). Apart from these initiatives, MA initiatives in the region remain largely non-existent.

1.2. Subtitling for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Arabic

Similar to AD, research on SDH in the Arabic context is sparse and limited. The first documented use of Arabic SDH was during the 2015 Ajyal Film Festival, specifically during the Inclusive Screening (El-Taweel, forthcoming). As it stands, SDH is currently only available on Netflix and during some film festivals' special screenings (El-Taweel, forthcoming) where the event is about or in celebration of disability. Al-Bkowr and Haidar (2023) conducted a qualitative analysis of Arabic SDH for the film *Blue Elephant 2* (Hamed, 2019). The guidelines Netflix developed for Arabic SDH, to the best of our knowledge, have not been tested with end-users (see El-Taweel, forthcoming). As a result, we are unable to assess their effectiveness and usability. Al-Abbas and Haidar (2021) researched the use of Modern Standard Arabic SDH, focusing on comprehension. Al-Abbas et al. (2022) conducted research on the viability of Netflix's Arabic SDH. These studies found that while the participants appreciated the paralinguistic element of the SDH and the technical specifications of the subtitles were adequate, the MSA did not convey the humorous dialogue well. The participants also emphasised the need for legislation to increase the prevalence of the SDH. The study did not research the guidelines. An alternative set of Arabic SDH guidelines has been developed by Hamad bin Khalifa University (HBKU) in Qatar; however, these have not been made public and have only been used in an academic setting.

Faculty and students in the MA in Audiovisual Translation programme in HBKU have researched SDH in the Arabic context. For example, El-Taweel (2016) investigated the potential use of emojis and emoticons in SDH. Hassan and Neves (2019) studied the use of SDH to improve vocabulary acquisition in deaf children. Al-Adarbi (2020) explored the best practice of character identification in SDH. Al-Swadi (2022) investigated how to convey sound effects in Arabic SDH. Due to these research projects and the annual inclusive screening during the Ajyal Film Festival, which features Arabic SDH, HBKU's guidelines are continually being developed and modified based on feedback from the audience.

1.3. Arabic Sign Language Interpreting

Sign language, along with sign language interpreting, has often been overlooked in both theoretical and practical frameworks within AVT, despite being widely recognised as a key mode of AVT and media accessibility (Tamayo, 2022). In this article, we frame sign language interpreting as an integral component of both AVT and media accessibility. Tamayo (2022) emphasises the need for research on sign language from a "translational perspective" (Tamayo, 2022, p. 145) within the domains of AVT and MA, a perspective that has been largely neglected to date.

ArSL, similarly to the Arabic language, has many regional varieties, most of which are considered colloquial. Efforts were made to standardise sign language and create ArSL in 2004 (Qatar Foundation International, 2023); however, regional ArSL varieties continue to be used in day-to-day situations. In 2005, Abdel-Fattah argued that ArSL varieties were still in their developmental stages (Tamayo, 2022, p. 213). However, since then, initiatives such as the Jumla Sign Language project, which offers

an online dictionary and ArSL recognition software (Mada Centre, n.d.), have led to an exponential development of ArSL. Such efforts are gradually advancing the status of ArSL, though much work remains to be done. According to an article from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (2014), Saudi Arabia had one sign language interpreter for every 93,00 hearing-impaired individuals, while the state of California in the US had one sign language interpreter for every 46 hearing-impaired individuals.

At the time of publication, no research on the use of ArSL in the media outside the scope of international news broadcasts was identified. Based on personal communication by one of the authors with different sign language interpreters in Qatar, it was possible to ascertain that sign language interpreting is provided on Qatar's national channel QTV for one evening news broadcast, Al Jazeera News Channel for two news broadcasts, and BeIN Sports for one news broadcast a year. During the National Day celebration week, sign language interpreting is provided on Al-Rayyan TV and QTV for programs related to Qatar National Day. In all of these situations, the unified ArSL is the sign language used.

1.4. Taboo in MA

Translation of taboo has traditionally been a challenging task for translators. Most Arab countries uphold conservative values that are deeply intertwined with their cultural practices, language and everyday communication. Translators, describers and interpreters have to find ways to navigate taboo content when adapting foreign and local content to specific groups or contexts. Alsharhan (2020) proposed a concept map of taboo language in Arabic that we present in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Concept System of Taboo Language

Note. Alsharhan, 2020, p. 9.

In audiovisual translation, the study of taboo has a long history. The research conducted on subtitling and taboo, although not specific to SDH, has laid the groundwork for how taboo is also addressed in SDH, and is especially relevant to this study. Díaz Cintas and Remael's (2014) work on subtitlers' strategies and Pedersen's (2011) work on extralinguistic cultural references are among the most widely employed taxonomies for subtitling taboo language.

When considering Arabic subtitling, most research on Arabic subtitles focuses on content from television and streaming platforms; however, this remains relevant to this study. For Arabic language on streaming platforms, Alsharhan (2020) identified the following strategies to deal with taboo language: retention, direct translation, standardisation, substitution, paraphrase, generalisation, specification and omission (p. 15). She concluded that, despite Netflix's no-censorship policy, almost half of the taboo language was indeed, whenever possible, euphemised.

Izwaini's (2017) study on censorship and manipulation of subtitling in the Arab world found that the translation strategies in Arabic subtitles for alcohol and drugs and body parts were often generalisation, and substitution or deletion for references to God and religion, sexual references, social designations and swearing (p. 53), which softens the original dialogue and alters the tone or nature of the interactions.

In SDH, Neves (2007) and Romero-Fresco (2009) argue that deaf organisations consider any type of editing to be potential censorship and advocate for verbatim subtitles. Netflix's guidelines for SDH subtitles also instruct subtitlers to include as much of the original content as possible and not to water down the subtitles. In AD, although the language used in a film cannot be censored (this meaning that blind audiences will hear any offensive dialogue present in the original script), describers often make a conscious choice to mitigate the impact of challenging visual content, such as scenes depicting sex, violence, death, or illness (Fryer, 2016). Research has shown that, when confronted with sexual scenes, describers tend to employ strategies such as using anatomical terms, amplifying certain aspects, or omitting details altogether, especially in instances of non-normative sexual acts (Sanz-Moreno, 2018, p. 60). These strategies often result in a form of "silencing" of sexual content, or its presentation in a politically correct manner (Chmiel & Mazur, 2014). However, some scholars contend that these omissions are unjustified, particularly in films or genres where such content is anticipated by the audience, arguing that such practices of censorship can be seen as patronising (Sanz-Moreno, 2018). In SDH, language may be subject to censorship (Díaz Cintas, 2020), but the visual aspects of the film are not subject to the same restrictions, which means that different audiences experience different kinds of censorship while watching the same content.

In the case of sign languages, taboo topics in Deaf communities encompass the common subjects typically found in spoken languages, as well as those unique to the Deaf experience. These include how Deaf people relate to hearing individuals, as well as how they interact with one another within the Deaf community (Mirus et al., 2023). The authors argue that taboo expressions in American Sign Language (ASL) exhibit a high level of linguistic creativity, particularly in their manipulation of linguistic structures. They are also innovative, and adapt to cultural changes, with lexical items that conflict with community norms being "corrected" or replaced.

There is a lack of research on the linguistic specialness of taboo expressions in SL. The few studies on sign language taboo include an investigation into the offensiveness of sexual orientation terms in ASL (Rudner & Butowsky, 1981) and a study on how the Venezuelan Deaf community navigates vulgar terminology related to death and intercourse (Pietrosemoli, 1994). Mirus et al. (2023) comment on the complex relationship between deaf communities and interpreters as they rely on them for communication but may also feel resentment or wariness towards the power or control that this reliance can sometimes give to interpreters (p. 11). Deaf sign language teachers advocate for teaching sign language interpreters swearwords as they serve linguistic, social (i.e. belonging), communicative, and emotional functions (Not an Angry Deaf Person, 2023), also arguing that the projection of the purity of ASL and the effort to not see deaf people as "low class" are other reasons that affect the use of vulgar language in ASL (Not an Angry Deaf Person, 2023). To the best of the author's knowledge, there is no research on how ArSLs interpreters deal with taboo.

Censorship in AVT is a complex issue mediated by a variety of external and internal factors. It can have political motivation when exercised by the state, or a religious or cultural motivation when related to what is considered politically correct and can be enforced by dubbing studios and distributors (Scandura, 2004). There can also be self-censorship brought by the translators

themselves in circumstances in which the translator anticipates state-imposed censorship (Gutiérrez Lanza, 2001) or as a result of translators' own beliefs, given that, as O'Connell (2000) notes, the choice or rejection of certain translation solutions regarding specific topics is never free from certain ideological manipulations on the part of the translator.

The consequences of censoring or manipulating AD or SDH content are significant, as such practices can effectively exclude audiences with visual or hearing impairments from content and information that is readily accessible to their sighted and hearing counterparts. This exclusion can result in a diminished understanding of certain aspects of the film, but, more critically, it can prevent these audiences from being exposed to particular language, social, and cultural practices. The impact is even more profound when the excluded content pertains to aspects of their own culture, as this limits their access to essential cultural knowledge that is central to cultural literacy. Gerber's research on the depiction of race in film and television underscores this point, asserting that "to deny people access to certain information further disables them" (Gerber, 2007, p. 36). Gerber further argues that "without cultural literacy, there can be no cultural equality" (Gerber, 2007, p. 27), highlighting the importance of ensuring that film and television are accessible to all audiences, as they play a critical role in reflecting society and fostering a shared cultural understanding.

Most of the existing literature on taboo has focused primarily on streaming platforms, with limited attention given to access services for audiences with disabilities. This gap in research has led to a lack of understanding about how these services are implemented and integrated in specific contexts, such as film festivals. This study aims to address this gap by exploring and documenting the practices related to access services at film festivals, providing valuable insights into how these events are adapting to meet the needs of diverse audiences. By examining the accessibility measures in place at festivals, this research seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the intersection between cinema, disability, and inclusive cultural experiences.

2. The Study

In this paper, we analyse visual and oral taboo elements, and discuss the strategies applied by describers, translators and interpreters to address them. In this section, we present the film under analysis, followed by an outline of the process of audio describing, subtitling and interpreting the film into ArSL.

The Palestinian film *200 Meters* by Amin Nayfeh constitutes the material for analysis. The film is about everyday life in Palestine and the separation created by the Israeli occupation. The main character of the film, Mustafa, lives 200 meters away from his wife and children, but they are separated by the apartheid wall in Palestine, and he is not allowed to go to the other side. The film portrays the challenges that he and his family face in performing everyday tasks, such as visiting the doctor. The film's main language is Palestinian Arabic, with additional dialogue in English and Hebrew.

This film was subtitled, audio described and interpreted into ArSL. The AD and SDH were carried out by students of the Master of Audiovisual Translation program at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar, in collaboration with the Doha Film Institute (DFI), for the *Voices of Palestine* film festival in November 2023. This work serves as a project for one of the courses of the master's programme, and students' assessment is based on their contributions to the festival's Inclusive Screening (see Jimenez Andres & El-Taweel, 2024). The students' work was supervised and reviewed by the course instructors to ensure it met professional standards.

In terms of guidelines, for the AD, the students followed the ADLAB guidelines to a certain extent, while for the SDH, the students followed the HBKU guidelines mentioned above. The instructors provided feedback to the AD and SDH, and their suggestions and corrections were incorporated into the script. However, the students were given the flexibility to make their own choices, even if those choices did not fully align with the guidelines. In some cases, they were not required to strictly adhere to all the rules, especially when cultural or linguistic considerations made alternative approaches more suitable. For ArSL, the sign language interpreter watched the film with the AD and then interpreted into ArSL. When asked why she did that, she explained that the AD gives her additional information that supports her interpretation. Listening to the AD helped her better understand the bigger picture and visual resources that may add to the ArSL. With *200 Meters*, this became particularly pertinent as the film was in three different languages. The sign language interpreter was proficient in only one of the three languages, so she relied on the Arabic audio subtitles to understand and interpret the sections of the film in English or Hebrew.

For this study, we have systematically analysed the key scenes containing taboo elements. Taboo content was identified through careful viewing, guided by the established categories of taboo in audiovisual translation research presented above. These elements were manually tagged and classified according to their thematic nature, including sexual references, profanity, references to bodily functions and political elements. As the study analyses different modalities of media accessibility (SDH, AD, and ArSL), different typologies were employed to examine how these elements were rendered in the target language. For subtitling, we adopted the typology proposed by Alsharhan (2020), which includes strategies such as retention, direct translation, standardisation, substitution, paraphrase, generalisation, specification, and omission. For AD and ArSL, no established typologies currently exist; therefore, the analysis was guided by the literature discussed in Section 1.2, supplemented by Alsharhan's framework due to its relevance to Arabic-language research. An open analytical approach was maintained to identify any additional strategies that may have emerged. To ensure consistency in the tagging and analysis process, repeated viewings were conducted, and ambiguous cases were discussed collaboratively to reach an agreement. This helped maintain a coherent and reliable framework for identifying and analysing the treatment of taboo content across all modalities. The strategies employed by translators, describers, and interpreters in each of these scenes—specifically in relation to AD, SDH, and ArSL—were examined and are presented below.

3. Findings

This section discusses the findings of the analysis, which are presented by 'critical scene', drawing from the concept of "critical points" as defined by Munday (2012):

> those points and lexical features in a text that in translation are most susceptible to value manipulation; those points that most frequently show a shift in translation, and those that generate the most interpretative and evaluative potential; those that may be most revealing of the translator's values. (p. 41)

In each subsection, we present and examine the strategies adopted by translators, describers and interpreters in those scenes that require a higher level of decision-making. In this film, these are taboo language, explicit scenes and political elements. We found that language was the most prevalent form of taboo (relevant for SDH and sign language interpreters), with some instances of visual elements also present (to be mediated by audio describers). These taboos were primarily expressed through language in the three languages of the film (Arabic, English, and Hebrew), but visual elements were also considered taboo. This is significant because it highlights the central role of linguistic mediation in handling sensitive content, and the ethical and cultural decisions required of translators, describers, and interpreters, especially when dealing with content that challenges norms or could be perceived as offensive. The findings include examples of the language used in the film. Although the linguistic instances of profanity were numerous, they largely consisted of a limited number of phrases repeated frequently. We selected a few of these phrases for analysis, as they seemed most representative of the overall use.

3.1. Taboo Language

The film *200 Meters* received a rating of 15+ by the Ministry of Culture in Qatar, indicating that the film contained scenes and language that may not be suitable for minors in Qatar. While Arab films may incorporate this type of language and visuals, they are not typically presented in films shown at film festivals in Qatar. Therefore, local audiences may not be accustomed to such content. In fact, some members of the audience voiced their dissatisfaction during the Q&A with the filmmaker after the screening, specifically concerning what they considered an excessive use of strong language in the film. The filmmaker's response was that this is the language used in Palestine and that being occupied and living through these injustices on a daily basis provokes and justifies the use of such language. The film wanted to manifest that.

As discussed in Section 1.4, Izwaini (2017) found that the strategies most commonly used when translating taboo terms in Arabic are generalisation and substitution (often via euphemisation) or deletion. For the festival, both translators and describers worked closely with the producers to strike a balance between accessibility and cultural sensitivities, particularly regarding profane language. For this project, three suggested strategies were proposed: omitting the profanity, euphemising it, or

using asterisks as a combination of both. In this article, we will examine the effectiveness and cultural implications of each strategy, considering both audience reception and the quality of translation.

In the subtitled translation of *200 Meters*, profane words like "f***" were either euphemised using softened Arabic equivalents or censored with asterisks to mitigate impact, as can be seen in the table below. The translators here had to balance respecting cultural norms while maintaining the voice and vision of the filmmaker. The choice the translator makes can shape how the film is understood by the audience and the emotional connection that is formed.

Table 1.

Example of a Combination of Omission and Euphemisation Strategies

Scene Line (in SL)	SDH Arabic	Back Translation of Arabic SDH	English SDH
Don't fucking lie to me!	لا تكذبي أيتها العـ***!	Do not lie, you b****!	Don't f***ing lie!
because of your fucking film	بسبب فيلمكِ اللعين.	Because of your cursed/damned film.	because of your f***ing film!

In the first example, a blend of euphemising and omission is used. Where the original intensity of the vulgar language is softened but not entirely removed. The festival organisers decided to use asterisks, a choice that is not commonly seen in the Arabic language. They made this decision to indicate that something needs to be censored while still maintaining the film's strong language and allowing audiences to infer the word without displaying it fully. The reasoning behind this choice stems from Arabic cultural norms, where direct vulgarity is often seen as more offensive than in English. To convey the same strategies in the audio subtitles, the subtitles were read out, but only the first letter or two of the profanity was uttered, and the rest was omitted. The second example employed euphemising in Arabic and a combination of euphemising and omission in English. This is due to the nature of the languages. As can be seen in the back translation of both examples, the word "f***" is not generally translated. By modifying the language, translators aimed to maintain the film's tone while respecting local cultural expectations.

Feedback from the audience indicated a mixed reaction. Those who used the subtitles found the use of asterisks humorous because the words can still be heard, and the language used in English is very common and well-known. However, the reaction to the audio subtitles was the opposite. The viewers appreciated the softening and omission of the "vulgar" language, but did not appreciate the fact that some words could still be heard. These comments were shared by some members of the audience in an informal feedback session conducted after the viewing at HBKU. They perceived that the language was too strong and did not align with the country's cultural norms. We also observed that participants appeared to prefer the censorship of such language in public settings, particularly in environments with families and mixed-gender audiences. This raises the question of whether a less censored

version of the film might be more acceptable for private and home-based viewings. More reception research is needed to find out more about audience preference of taboo in media accessibility.

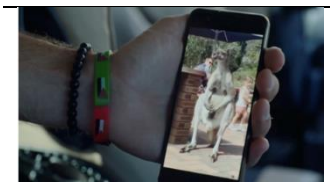
In the sign language interpretation, profanity was completely omitted. The sign language interpreter expressed her discomfort in signing those words and decided not to translate them at all. This decision highlights the ethical dimension of respecting both translators' and describers' personal values and cultural norms, an often-overlooked consideration in discussions about language fidelity. This self-censorship by the accessibility provider in MA has been documented by other studies in relation to AD (Sanz-Moreno, 2017, 2018), given that certain scenes of a certain sexual nature were not described. However, contrary to what happens in AD, in which the audio describer remains anonymous, in sign language interpreting, the interpreter is projected onto the cinema screen. She is also well known within the small local deaf community, so rather than "protecting" the audience (Fryer, 2016), as the argument goes for other forms of censorship in MA, in this case, the interpreter seemed to be "protecting" herself. This was achieved, however, not without implications for accessibility, in that this version was assessed by viewers as less authentic and less emotionally charged than the original film. This illustrates how choices made by translators, whether for cultural, personal, or ethical reasons, can directly influence how Deaf and hearing audiences experience a film, sometimes affecting its emotional impact or authenticity.

3.2. Explicit Scenes

Because the explicit scenes had no dialogue, they posed an issue only in the audio description, not in the SDH or sign language interpreting. The audio describers' choices in the film were generally conservative, with none of the sensitive scenes (particularly those deemed controversial from a Qatari perspective) presented directly. In the following example, for instance, a young boy was showing Mustafa a video of a kangaroo of a sexual nature. In the AD, the scene was described as follows:

Table 2.

Example of Omission Strategy

Scene	The audio description	AD English back translation
	يري رامي مقطع فيديو لمصطفى فيتجاهله.	Rami shows Mustafa a video, and he ignores him.

The audio describers chose not to discuss the actual content of the video; instead, they described the scene by saying, “Rami shows Mustafa a video, and he [Mustafa] ignores him.” This is in line with findings from other scholars (Chmiel & Mazur, 2014; Sanz-Moreno, 2018).

The non-description of indecent scenes may have been influenced by assumptions about audience sensitivities in Arab communities, where such content could be perceived as offensive. Omitting the word entirely may have reduced the emotional intensity and narrative clarity of the scene. An alternative approach, such as using a more general term like “أيها اللعين” [you, cursed one], could have preserved the confrontational tone while aligning with cultural sensitivities. This illustrates how avoiding sensitive content can impact the extent to which a story is communicated to all audiences and their engagement with the film.

3.3. Political Elements

One might contend that all aspects of life are inherently political, more so when referring to Palestine, a region that remains under occupation. Manipulation can be politically motivated (Wang, 2020). In this section, we discuss some scenes that, based on current geopolitical dynamics, we consider containing explicit political references and that may be handled differently by translators and describers in different contexts or countries, depending on ideology or a country’s stance towards the occupation. This section primarily addresses AD, as the translators’ and describers’ political stances shaped how the visual elements were described.

People in Palestine live with numerous manifestations of the Israeli occupation daily, including checkpoints controlled by Israeli soldiers, the dispersal of settlers throughout various locations, and other impediments to their everyday lives. The point of contention in this scenario is that Palestinians and many Arabs and Muslims do not believe in the State of Israel and believe that “Israel” is occupied Palestine. In *200 Meters*, the premise of the film is that Mustafa, the main character, is in Palestine while his family is in occupied Palestine, otherwise referred to as “Israel”. These manifestations were depicted visually in various forms, the most notable of which was the wall that extends across different areas of the occupied West Bank.

Table 3.

Example of Naming Strategy

Scene	Audio description	AD English back translation
	يراقب من خلف الحائط القصير جدار الفصل العنصري الذي يفصل منزله عن الأراضي الخاضعة لسيطرة الاحتلال.	From behind the short wall, he watches the apartheid wall that separates his home from the lands under occupation.

In this figure, the audio describers made the wall the focus of the scene. They described it as "He watches the apartheid wall from behind the short wall that separates his home from the lands under occupation". The strategy used in this example is "naming", where the audio describers explicitly state the name of the reference (apartheid wall) without further description.

What is unique about this example is the use of the term' apartheid wall' to describe it. The term *apartheid* carries powerful political connotations, acknowledging Palestinian experiences of isolation and occupation. However, this choice can be polarising in global contexts where different perspectives on the conflict exist. For many viewers, especially those familiar with the situation, the term is more than just a political stance. It represents real experiences of isolation, limited freedom, and loss. However, this language may be perceived as inappropriate in global settings, where individuals with diverse perspectives may view it as politicised.

The decision to do this has multiple implications, one of them is that after selecting this sentence, the audio describers gave it priority and placed the spotlight on the wall. This is regarded as a crucial element in the film because all events centre around it. Nevertheless, they did not describe the wall itself (height, robustness, colour), nor did they mention other details regarding the geography of Palestine, such as the trees that the house looks out over, or other details that were not highlighted in the audio description. Thus, this choice would increase the ability to draw the blind audience's attention to that wall. The audio describers used the describing and naming strategy by not only identifying the presence of the walls and barbed wire but also detailing their appearance, making the visual impact more vivid and meaningful for the audience. However, a more visually rich description would have included the height of the wall, or to describe the feeling of going through a tunnel, a claustrophobic feeling (see the example in Table 4).

The emphasis on the wall and its description as an "apartheid wall" highlights the manifestations of occupation and carries significant political weight. If the audio describers wanted to stay neutral, they could have turned a blind eye and avoided mentioning them by using the generalisation strategy, and

saying “The car passes between two walls”. Focusing on all these details brings the manifestations of the Israeli occupation to light.

Table 4.

Example of SDH Describing and Naming Explicating Strategy

Scene	The audio description	AD English back translation
	تعبر السيارة بين حائطين يعلوهما سياج شائك.	The car passes between two walls topped with a barbed wire fence.

In the Arabic and English SDH, “the wall” was referenced how the character referenced it: as a “f****** wall” for English SDH and as a “sh** wall” for Arabic SDH. These examples convey the character’s frustration and anger. However, the choices made and the strategies followed are not political.

Another manifestation of the Israeli occupation was the extensive presence of the Israeli military**.** In one of the scenes, Mustafa and the other passengers on the smuggling bus pass by a group of soldiers (or, to be consistent with the film language), Israeli settlers, waving Israeli flags. The AD described them as follows:

Table 5.

Example of AD Describing and Naming Explicating Strategy

Scene	The audio description	AD English back translation
	تصور آني المستوطنين.	Anne films the settlers.

In these examples, the AD focused on the fact that the presence of Israeli settlers caught the attention of the foreign girl Anne, so she took the initiative to film. In addition, the term “settlers” was chosen to describe the Israelis, which reflects the Israeli presence in the settlements built on the occupied Palestinian lands. The term “settlers” aligns the AD and SDH with the original dialogue,

reflecting the Israeli presence on occupied Palestinian lands. While this choice underscores a pro-Palestinian perspective, it may be contentious for audiences with differing views.

By using politically charged terminology such as “settlers” and including profane expressions, the SDH mirrors the original dialogue’s emotional intensity while aligning with a pro-Palestinian perspective, as seen in Table 6. The translators stated that they would have still used “settlers” or even “Zionists” to describe the characters who are “Israeli”.

Table 6.

Example of SDH Describing and Naming Explicating Strategy

Scene Line (in SL)	Arabic SDH	Back Translation	English SDH
مستوطنين ولاد شرموطه	مستوطنون أولاد الشـ!*****	Settlers sons of who***!	Settlers, sons of b****es.

Using what can be classified as “politically charged” terminology such as “apartheid wall” and “settlers”, the AD and the SDH bring forward the Palestinian and the pro-Palestine perspective. The implications of these translation strategies extend beyond linguistic choices, as they carry cultural and political weight that shapes audience interpretations. This case exemplifies how audio description can go beyond mere translation to become a medium of representation and political action. This is important because it challenges the idea that accessibility services are, or should be, neutral. Instead, it reveals how these practices actively participate in shaping ideological and political narratives, especially in contexts of occupation and resistance.

A final observation we would like to raise, and which we find particularly relevant for the study, is the post-screening Q&A with the filmmaker, during which an audience member expressed concerns about the film’s use of language, which he found vulgar, as well as the portrayal of women not adhering to what he described as “local standards of modesty”. Both elements (one visual and one oral) were actually not accessible to the blind and deaf audiences, respectively, since that language was not signed, and the AD did not include the clothing in most scenes. This raises concerns about inclusion and accessibility for blind and deaf audiences, who may have felt excluded or perceived certain content as being censored for them. In fact, neither members of the blind nor the deaf community were engaged in the discussion with the filmmaker.

In response, the filmmaker explained that the language used in the film reflects the way Palestinians speak in Palestine, capturing the anger—perhaps understated—that comes from living under occupation. By censoring such language, interpreters and translators not only sanitise the dialogue but also erase the emotional and linguistic expressions that accompany the experience of occupation. This highlights the need for film festivals to ensure that all audiences, regardless of sensory or cultural background, can fully engage in discussions and connect with the film.

4. Final Remarks

This study illustrates the complexity in making taboo, explicit and political content accessible in a conservative context like Qatar. The findings from the film *200 Meters* inclusive screening show that there is a tension between the need for cultural sensitivity and the desire to preserve the film's emotional intensity. The strategies of euphemisation, omission, and asterisking, all aimed at mitigating the impact of "vulgar" language, ultimately raise important questions about the role of the translator and describer in navigating cultural taboos. These strategies, though pragmatic in a conservative cultural context, also introduce a form of censorship that risks distorting the film's original tone. In this sense, the strategies employed are not merely linguistic choices; they represent a larger negotiation between the authenticity of the original material and the cultural values of the target audience. This process of negotiation is far from neutral, as it reflects broader power dynamics in translation, where the cultural norms of the target audience are prioritised over the author's original intentions.

The case of *200 Meters* shows how translators, describers, and sign language interpreters navigate ethical, political, and professional dilemmas when mediating sensitive content. While their choices enabled the film to be screened in a conservative environment, they also constrained the representation of emotional and political nuance. The political elements in the film underscore the unavoidable politicisation of translation. The choice of terms such as "apartheid wall" and "settlers" in the audio description and SDH subtitles is a deliberate act of political positioning, reflecting the ideological stance of the translators and describers. These choices are not merely about accurately conveying the film's content, but also about situating it within a specific political discourse.

This highlights an essential point: accessibility is not a neutral act. They are imbued with the values, biases, and political contexts of those involved in the process. In this regard, the translators and describers of *200 Meters* not only acted as intermediaries of accessibility, but also as agents of political representation, demonstrating how access services can function as a tool for ideological influence. Since this study is based on a single case, the findings should be viewed with caution. Still, they raise useful questions for future research. How do Arabic-speaking audiences react to censored or softened SDH and AD? How do interpreters' personal beliefs affect the decision to exclude taboo content in ArSL? Would people respond differently to uncensored content in private settings compared to public ones? And more broadly, how can accessibility services in the Arab world stay true to the original film while also respecting local cultural and institutional limits? By foregrounding these questions, we hope this study contributes to the emerging literature on Arabic media accessibility and encourages further research into the socio-political dimensions of AD, SDH, and ArSL in diverse Arab contexts.

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