



Is Modern Standard Arabic A Good Language for Subtitling?

The case of subtitling abbreviations, technical terms and compoundwords in The American series Grey's Anatomy

Dr. Abdelouahab ELBAKRI

University of Ibn Zohr, Agadir, Morocco

ABSTRACT: Subtitles tend to use a standard form of language for the sake of clarity and accessibility to different types of viewers regardless of their idiosyncrasies. However, the use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in subtitling may not always achieve this objective. This article aims at arguing that MSA hinders the subtitler's task as it does not provide them with the tools that might enable them to carry out their mission efficiently. It provides evidence that the problem is not exclusively connected to the specificity of subtitling as a constrained translation or to the ideological motives that engender manipulation. It concludes that MSA manipulates subtitlers as the linguistic options it offers are very limited if not sometimes inexistent. These restrictions and scarcities of options manipulate translators and push them in turn to manipulate their translations.

KEYWORDS: Abbreviations, Compound Words, MSA, Manipulation, Subtitling, Technical Terms

1. INTRODUCTION

Subtitling American movies in Arabic involves two major difficulties. The first difficulty stems from the very nature of subtitling as a constrained form of translation impeded by linguistic, cultural and technical limitations. The second difficulty emanates from the very nature of the target language as the subtitling is solely done in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). This regenerated form of Classical Arabic, which was intended to take the Arab World to modernity and embrace scientific development, has become a real communicative handicap. Arab citizens have found themselves in a terribly awkward situation. On the one hand, their education and official communication is totally done in MSA; on the other hand their everyday communication is performed in vernacular. Today, MSA does not have any speech community. All over the Arab world, nobody speaks it as their first/native language. Its use among different Arab communities is governed by the political decision of their leaders, which is in turn stimulated by religious motives.

In the mid-20th century, on the cusp of the worldwide decolonization and institution of Arab states as independent entities, the decision was made to establish MSA as a unifying official language. The aim was to reinforce 'the ties of brotherhood' within the pan-Arab nation and to strengthen the status of Arabic against the threat of other languages such as the colonizers' and the different vernaculars. MSA has thus become the language of education, politics, media, science, etc.

However, in translating audiovisual texts into MSA, translators may encounter some linguistic contexts that challenge the ability of the language and its appropriateness to AVT texts. We do not mean here the socio-cultural factors that push translators to resort to mediation, but we mean the purely linguistic inability of MSA to cope with the rocketing development of English. That's why; in the present article we would like to provide evidence for this claim and argue that MSA may not offer the best options to subtitler's. To achieve this objective we shall present three examples: abbreviations, technical words and compound words.

2. MSA SUBTITLING CONSTRAINTS

MSA is the language used to subtitle in Arabic. However, using this linguistic channel involves many shortcomings. Subtitles, in general, are subject to spatial and temporal constraints. In the case of MSA the effect is even heavier. In Arabic, the two-line subtitle may include nearly 70 characters spread over the two lines. This figure is within the European standard which has been applied since 1988 with the 5mm film laser caption. Alkhoury (2011) contends that the Arabic subtitles are unique because of the morphology of Arabic words. She states that Arabic subtitles are characterized by two major aspects. First, short vowels are not written but they are pronounced. Second, the root of the word in Arabic and the affixes are assembled in a way that allows a significant reduction of space in Arabic subtitles in comparison to other languages.



A subtitle cannot be displayed on screen for less than two seconds and more than six seconds. The display time of a two-line Arabic subtitle is usually between four and six seconds. Yet, the challenge in the Arab context is twofold. On the one hand, there are striking discrepancies regarding the number of characters per line and their display time. On the other hand, more than 25% of the population (according to Arab League Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2017) is illiterate while another 25%'s ability of reading is between poor and average. So, the reading speed is another constraint that should be considered as a big segment of viewers' ability of reading is weak in comparison to Western Europe for example.

The spatial constraint must respect the readability of the subtitles. It is highly affected by settings related to editing pace and subtitle cutting. The pace of the editing governs the cutting of the subtitles. Each plan is a global visual unit in which the subtitle is inserted. For this reason, it is highly recommended that a subtitle should be part of a single plan. A subtitle that overlaps two consecutive shots would prompt the viewer to resume reading from the beginning when the plan changes.

As to text reduction, Alkhoury argues that the rate of text reduction in Arabic subtitles is between 37% and 39% which is slightly higher than the figures provided for other languages by Baker (1998), which is 33%, and by Scharwz (2002), which is 36%. This reduction can even be more significant given the morphosyntactic properties of Arabic.

3. MSA AS THE FIRST LANGUAGE OF ARABS

Edward Sapir (1929: 208) argues that "it is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection." Yet, the problem with MSA is that it is not used as a means of communication reflecting the reality of its 'so-called speakers'. It is utilized to solve a specific problem of communication between Arab states and to create a common Arab identity. Sapir also claims that the fact of the matter is that the real world is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. (1929: 209)

MSA does not meet these two criteria as well. The real world of Arab countries is built on their vernaculars which are the common linguistic means used in all aspects of their everyday life. MSA can neither represent any reality relative to them nor reflect it. Within the same logic, a language cannot characterize the reality of two different societies. So, how can MSA reflect the realities of a range of societies throughout the Arab world? This question joins Lotman's theory, which stipulates that a language cannot exist unless it is deeply-rooted in the context of culture; and similarly a culture cannot exist unless it has at its center the structure of natural language. Bassnett (1991) goes even further in her interpretation of Lotman's statement to claim that language is the heart within the body of culture. Both body and heart complement each other and cannot be separated.

On the basis of these theories, we must acknowledge that this state of diglossia in the Arab World is problematic. Language and culture, there, are not body and heart in accordance with Bassnett's description. MSA cannot be the heart of Arab cultures since it does not reflect their realities. A lot of scholars argue that diglossia has had negative effects on many aspects of life, inter alia education. According to Maamouri (1998), the low quality results of Arab education systems are due to the diglossic situations in schools and the glaring linguistic incongruity of the various Arabic colloquial forms and MSA. Zughoul (1980) considers that the high rate of illiteracy and diglossia are tightly related. Al Sobh et al (2015) posit that diglossia is the source of considerable problems to the linguistic community both inside and outside the Arabic-speaking world and tends to contribute significantly to the obstruction of educational and economic development in the Arab world. Sotiropolous (1977) concludes that "no serious efforts were made by scholars and linguists to propose possible solutions for linguistic problems resulting from the existence of this phenomenon in the Arabic-speaking world" (7). As a result, Arabs are found in a stalemate. They are torn between two languages one "for communicating thoughts, ideas, feelings, relationships, friendships, cultural ties, and through which emotions are shaped and perceptions of reality are determined" (Whorf cited in Kramersch 2005: 554), and a second one they solely meet in books and media.

4. SUBTITLING IN MSA

In AVT, especially in subtitling, the issue becomes even more noticeable. Translators have to render the English spoken text (the script) into written subtitles in MSA, in other words from colloquial English to standard Arabic. However, it may be argued that



this fact is applicable for subtitling in general in all languages as spoken sequences are shifted to two-line written subtitles. In this case, standard varieties are used in subtitling mainly for two reasons,

- the simplification and clarification of dialog, particularly that spoken in non-standard language.
- the impulse to maintain conformity with the usage of Standard English as the norm in written texts. (Hamaida 2007)

Diaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 185) adhere to this view and claim that “most subtitles display a preference for conventional, neutral word order and simple well-formed stereotypical sentences.” They are more concerned “with clarity, readability, and transparent references.” Subtitles tend to use a standard form of language for the sake of clarity and accessibility to different types of viewers regardless of their idiosyncrasies.

However, my argument in this article is that comparing MSA to other standard forms of other languages is a great fallacy. Unlike, English, French or Spanish for example, the dissimilarity between standard Arabic and other Arabic dialects is dreadful. Trudgill (1999: 118) asserts that “Standard English is ... not the English language but simply one variety of it [among many other varieties].” And that “most native speakers of English in the world are native speakers of some non-standard variety of the language.” So, children are born with a non-standard variety and later learn the standard variety at school and acquire simultaneously the skill of moving from one variety to another depending on the degree of formality of a social situation. Globally speaking, “it is by far the most important dialect in the English-speaking world from a social, intellectual and cultural point of view; and it does not have an associated accent” (ibid.: 123). This description is also applicable to Standard French, for example. It is a variety, among other French varieties, that also marks the social and intellectual status of individuals within the global French community. MSA is a totally different case: it is not a variety among other varieties; it does not have any speech community; it is not shifted to in any social context to mark formality, except when speakers are from different Arab states. More than that, MSA does not develop in the same way other languages do. Development and change are inherent in the nature of language. Sapir (1921) states that

Language moves down time in a current of its own making. Nothing is perfectly static. Every word, every grammatical element, every locution, every sound and accent is a slowly changing configuration molded by the invisible and impersonal drift that is the life of language. (150)

The everyday use of language by its natives within its speech community is a ‘current’ that generate inevitable change. This change is mostly driven by many factors. Aitchison (2001) suggests three socio-linguistic causes accounting for this change: fashion, foreign influence and social need. Change may affect all the aspects of a language. It can be phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and lexical by adding new words, deleting obsolete ones or by even changing the grammatical categories of certain lexical items. All these processes are natural consequences of ‘the drift’ of ‘the current’ of language itself.

MSA lacks an authentic speech community and real socio-linguistic contexts for use. It is mainly used in media, official meetings, formal, political and administrative communication and for educational and academic purposes. That is why; its process of change is noticeably slow in comparison to other standard languages. Its development mainly depends on borrowing from other languages or on the contribution of language academies established for the purpose. Abdulaziz (1987 cited by Ryding 2005) states that

Arab academies have played a large role in the standardization of modern written and formal Arabic, to an extent that today throughout the Arab world there is more or less one modern standard variety. This is the variety used in newspapers, newsreel broadcasting, educational books, official and legal notices, academic materials, and instructional texts of all kinds. (7)

This difference is heavily felt by translators whose task is to negotiate the differences existing between the potentials of the two linguistic channels. Because the ST text is more dynamic and expressive than the TT, the translator is forced to manipulate.

5. CASE STUDY

We shall argue that MSA hinders the subtitler’s task. Because of the above mentioned factors, MSA does not provide subtitlers with the tools that might enable them to carry out their mission efficiently. We will provide evidence that the problem is not exclusively connected to the three factors mentioned earlier:



- the specificity of subtitling as a constrained translation
- the movement from a colloquial variety to a standard written variety
- the ideological motives that engender manipulation.

Our argument will lead us to the conclusion that MSA manipulates subtitlers. In many cases, the linguistic options offered to Arabic subtitlers are very limited if not inexistent. These restrictions and scarcities of options manipulate translators and push them in turn to manipulate their translations. Hereinafter, we shall discuss some examples of these linguistic manipulations to provide ground for our claim.

5.1 Subtitling abbreviations

In English, abbreviations, especially acronyms, are a significant and idiosyncratic part of everyday vocabulary. They are found not only in scientific and non-scientific journals (e.g. DNA, EEG, CD-ROM, DVD, radar, sonar, VAT, CPI, OXO, NATO, NHS, etc.) , but also in the media and in daily life language (e.g., AFAIC , BRB, FYI, HTH, IMO, LOL, OMG, etc.). Newmark (1988: 148) argues that acronyms are generally used for reasons of brevity or euphony and to rouse people to find out what the letters stand for. They are utilized to serve many purposes: to minimize the speaking time or writing space, to cause confusion for those who are not familiar with them and also to create a feeling of inclusion for those who understand them. Using acronyms may as well be due to the magic they have for the unusual combination of meaning and pronunciation. Speakers feel quite self-confident as the channel they use is not explicit but codified.

Acronyms are rarely used in Arabic. In most cases, Arabic uses the English ones. We can state here the example of international organizations (UNESCO/اليونسكو, FAO/الفاو, OPEC/الأوبك, FIFA/الفيفا, etc.) In subtitling, translating acronyms into Arabic goes against the rule of subtitling. Subtitlers usually reduce the spoken text by some 30%; while with acronyms they have to reverse the action. The two letter acronym the US turns into a two word phrase الولايات المتحدة. There is absolutely no other option to solve this problem because Arabic does not allow so. We will give examples of acronyms and their translation and we will discuss their effect.

Grey's Anatomy is full of medical acronyms. Here are some examples and their subtitles:

Season/episode	Medical acronym	Subtitle
1/1	I.V	المصل
	C.T	صورة طبقية
	CBC	تعداد كامل للدم
	chem-7	مجموعة الفحوص الكيميائية
	TS	فحص السمية
	O.R	غرفة العمليات
	I.D	يتعرف على
	B.P	ضغط الدم
	P.E	انصمام رئوي
	V/Q scan	مسح للتهوية و التروية
	IVC	الوريد الأجوف السفلي
1/2	Your B.U.N	نسبة أحماض البول في دمك
1/3	GCS 3	سجل ثلاثة على مقياس غلاسكو للغيبوبة
	EEG	تخطيط للمخ
	AMA	استمارة التأمين الصحي
	PRVC	كرات الدم الحمراء
	MRI	الرنين المغناطيسي
	ERCP	تصوير البنكرياس والأقنية الصفراوية بالتنظير الباطني
1/5	CABG	عملية القلب المفتوح
	BT	وثيرة سيلان الدم
	PTT	الثروموبلاستين الجزئي ووقته

	INR	مستقبل الأنسولين
	HNH	خضاب الدم و مكداسه
1/6	EKG	تخطيط كهربائية القلب
	DBS	تحفيز عميق للدماغ
	CVP	ضغط وريدي مركزي
	PEA	نشاط كهربائي عديم النبض
2/10	NICU	وحدة العناية المركزة لحديثي الولادة

Table 1: List of medical abbreviations

Diaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 145) posit that “The written version of speech in subtitles is nearly always a reduced form of the oral ST.” The subtitler’s task is to omit what is not necessary for the understanding of the text and reformulate the message as concisely as possible. That is why; text reduction is resorted to and many techniques are applied to achieve that objective inter alia abbreviations, as “most languages will allow some kind of abbreviation.” What if a language, such as MSA, does not allow these abbreviations? Subtitlers find themselves in situations in which, instead of reducing and condensing the message in subtitles, they have to do exactly the opposite.

Considering the examples given above, we can recognize the intricacy of the subtitlers’ task. Instead of using an abbreviation of two to four letters, they have to use phrases of two to six words which will have heavy repercussions on the process and outcome of subtitling. Let’s consider the following sequence from Grey’s Anatomy:

Situation: season 1 episode 5. Dr Grey informs Dr Burke of a patient’s last accounts
Grey: BT, PTT, INR, platelet counts were all stable. Even her HNH were stable.
غراي: وثيرة سيلان الدم و الثروموبلاستين الجزئي ووقته و مستقبل الأنسولين و تعداد اللوحات كلها مستقرة حتى خضاب الدم و مكداسه كان مستقرا.

The spoken text should have been reduced by 30%. Surprisingly enough, it is increased by 70%. This sequence is divided into three frames all of which take four seconds, an average of less than a second and a half for each frame, which is technically against the rules of subtitling. In the scene, Grey is enormously troubled because of the professional error she thought she made. Her way of speaking reflects her state of mind. Her answers are short, concise and swift. Unfortunately, the Arabic subtitles do not reflect the situation. The English abbreviations turn into long difficult phrases that the viewer will surely decipher with discomfort. Here in another example.

Situation: Season2 episode 10; Addison signs her contract at the hospital
Dr Webber: Your own service, a state-of-the-art NICU, and a salary that makes you one of the highest-paid surgeons in the northwest.
ويبر: قسم خاص بك الأكثر تقدما في وحدة العناية المركزة لحديثي الولادة راتب يجعلك أحد الجراحين الأعلى أجراً في الشمال الغربي.

The acronym NICU which stands for ‘neonatal intensive care unit’ is subtitled literally into a five word phrase. The first frame ‘Your own service, a state-of-the-art NICU’ which corresponds to the Arabic subtitle ‘وحدة العناية المركزة’ lasts 3:07. It is undoubtedly a quite short time to read and understand Webber’s statement. I strongly believe that it is impossible for viewers, in both examples, to fully read the subtitles no matter how fast they can do. The act of manipulation in this case is incited by the nature of MSA which cannot meet the pace of the development of English. This latter has found in abbreviations an efficient way to cope with the rocketing evolution of science, technology and telecommunication.

5.2 Subtitling technical words

Another source of manipulation is seen in the use of technical words. Most specialized lexical items in English are single words or pair terms. However, in Arabic, as we have seen with abbreviations, these terms take the form of long phrases which do not in any way fit the context of subtitles. Hereinafter are examples of medical terms occurring in *Grey’s Anatomy* and their corresponding subtitles.

Season/ episode	Medical term	Subtitle
1/1	Appendectomy	عملية استئصال الزائدة
	Clamp	ملقط مثبت
	Geriatrics	طب الشيخوخة
	Antibiotics	مضادات حيوية
	Anoxia	نقص في الأكسجين
	Aneurysm	الورم الوعائي
1/3	hemipelvectomy	الاستئصال الحوضي النصفى
1/6	Claustrophobic	رهاب الاحتجاز
	Dyskinesia	الاضطرابات الحركية
	hemidiaphragm	نصف I الحجاب الحاجز
	Intraspinal catheter	القطر داخل العمود الفقري
	V-tach	تسرع القلب البطيني
1/7	Bronchoscopy	تنظير القصبات
	hemispherectomy	استئصال نصف كرة المخ
	Lobectomy	استئصال الفص الأمامي
	Laparoscopy	تنظير البطن
	Malnutrition	سوء التغذية
	Diaphragm	العازل المانع للحمل
	hemopneumothorax	الاسترواح الصدري الدموي
	Anesthesiologist	طبيب التخدير
	Sepsis	تعفن الدم
2/10	Hyponatremia	نقص صوديوم الدم

Table 2: List of medical terms

A cursory view on the table above makes us recognize an issue similar to that discussed earlier. The one word technical terms are transformed in Arabic to two, three or even four words. These Arabic terms are mostly complex and difficult to read. Medical terms in particular, and technical terms in general, are complicated to grasp for common people as well as for beginners who intend to specialize in the matter for two basic reasons. The study conducted by Argeg (2015) concludes that the problem emanates from the use of literal translation of prefixes, suffixes and roots as well as the heavy use of transliteration. Yaseen (2013) concludes that Arabic dictionaries and specialized books and journals use terms which are mostly descriptive translations. These translations are mostly done by translators who are not necessarily specialists in the domain. The descriptive and literal characteristics of these terms justify their complexity and exaggerated length. They get even longer and more complex when they occur in subtitles. The viewer can neither read them appropriately nor understand their meaning accurately. Let's consider this scene:

Situation: season 1 episode 7. Dr Karev informs Dr Burke about a patient's state.
Burke: What happened?
Karev: Multi-symptom organ failure, secondary to overwhelming sepsis. Now he's all...Fix his BP, that should help his mental status. He's maxed out. We got V-tach
بورك: ماذا حصل كارف: قصور بأعضاء أجهزته المتعددة بعد خمج ساحق للدم. لقد تغير الآن. داو ضغط دمه سيفيد وضعه العقلي. رفعنا ضغطه إلى أقصى حد. يعاني تسرع القلب البطيني

This exchange is divided into four frames, all of which last 9 seconds and a half. The Arabic text is 20% bigger than the English. The difficulty of the unfamiliar words used in the Arabic subtitles renders the reading a hard task for the viewer and the timing allowed to do so makes it almost an impossibility. Diaz Cintas and Remael (2007) maintain that



it is very frustrating and disconcerting to see how the subtitle disappears from the screen when we have not yet finished reading it, or to end up with a feeling of stress because we have been forced to read too fast and have not had the time to enjoy the images. (95)

The frustration of the Arab viewer is thus doubled. First, the subtitles are too loaded for the frames, a fact that makes the simultaneous tasks of reading and watching a real challenge. Second, the technical words employed are long and complex which hinders the viewer's understanding of the content of the scenes. This complexity stems from the failure of MSA to provide adequate professional jargons instead of relying on descriptive translations and transliterations. Subtitlers stand again helpless in front of this situation imposed by the underdeveloped nature of MSA.

5.3 Compound words

Another lexical problem arises when the English ST uses compound nouns. Quirk (1973) defines compounding as the process of adding two base words together to form a new lexical item. For example, when adding the base 'foot' to base 'ball', we can get a new word: 'football'. Dressler (2005) identifies two types of compound nouns: exocentric and endocentric compounds. Endocentric compounds have their heads within the compound itself, such as 'Bluetooth', while the heads of exocentric compounds must be inferred e.g. 'hard headed'. Compound nouns may take three different forms:

- **Closed Form:** joining two words together to form a single word: redhead, makeup, keyboard, etc.
- **Hyphenated Form:** connecting two or more words with one or more hyphens between them: six-pack, five-year-old, son-in-law, etc.
- **Open Form:** two or more separate words with a space between them acting as one noun: post office, middle class, attorney general, etc.

Translating compound nouns is a hard task for many reasons. First, the meaning of some compounds cannot be deduced from their parts, example: pineapple. Also, the meaning of compounds cannot be determined from their component but it is either context bound or culture bound, example: greenback. In addition, the compounds may play different grammatical roles depending on their occurrences. What makes the task even harder is when the compound is not common noun, but a creative coining.

In the following discussion, we will study some examples of these compound nouns either common or coined and we will argue that the subtitler is manipulated by MSA's limited potential and inflexibility. The first scene is taken from *Grey's Anatomy*.

Situation: Season2 episode 10; Addison signs her contract at the hospital
Dr Webber: Your own service, a state-of-the-art NICU, and a salary that makes you one of the highest-paid surgeons in the northwest.
ويبر: قسم خاص بك الأكثر تقدماً في وحدة العناية المركزة لحديثي الولادة راتب يجعلك أحد الجراحين الأعلى أجراً في الشمال الغربي.

According to Cambridge Online Dictionary the state-of-the-art is under the following entry:

Adjective /'steɪt·əv·ði'ɑ:t/, the best and most modern of its type: a state-of-the-art computer system

It is a noun phrase acting as an adjective. It refers to the highest level of general development, as of a device, technique, or scientific field achieved at a particular time. The term has been used since 1910, and has become both a common term in advertising and marketing, and a legally significant phrase with respect to both patent law and tort liability

Considering the translation provided in the subtitles, the compound is translated as الأكثر تقدماً/the most advanced. This expression does not fully meet the meaning of the adjective because it provides only half meaning. It is also the case of most English-Arabic dictionaries which suggest one of three words: عصري، متقدم، حديث. When Dr Webber tells Dr Shepherd that her service is a **state-of-the-art** NICU, he means that it has the highest level of development and it uses the most advanced and updated technology, equipment and facilities. This meaning is not conveyed in Arabic either in the translation in the subtitles or in the translations provided by dictionaries. An appropriate translation would be: الأحدث والأكثر تقدماً.

Here is another example of a compound noun, but this time it is a coined one.



Situation: Season1 episode7. George and Izzie discover that Christina knows about Grey’s affair.	
George: You know about him and Meredith? She knows.	
Izzie: What, about doctor-cest?	
Christina: It’s been going on for, like, ever.	
جورج: تعرفين عنه وعن ميريديث؟ إنها تعلم. إيزي: ماذا عن سفاح الطبيبين؟ كريستينا: لقد كانت مستمرة ، منذ وقت طويل.	

Izzie coins the compound word ‘doctor-cest’ from two words, ‘doctor’ and ‘incest’, to describe the intimate relationship that links Dr Grey to Dr Shepherd. She implies that doctors within Seattle Grace Hospital are a family and that any sexual relationship between two members of that family is kind of repugnant incest condemned by the community. In the Arabic subtitles, there is allusion to the fact that the intimate relationship between the two doctors is forbidden. The subtitler uses the terms سفاح الطبيبين/adultery of the two doctors. However, this description excludes the element of repulsiveness existing in [in]cest’ disdained by all doctrines and social pacts. ‘Incest’ in Arabic is زنا المحارم. It is a compound noun that cannot morphologically be linked to another noun to form another combination. Moreover, as seen earlier, MSA does not allow the same coining process that English, the ST, applies. And even with innovative and creative attempts from writers and translators, the reaction of the TA would be undoubtedly negative. In this sequence, the subtitler makes a smart noun combination and the loss is relatively compensated. However, sometimes the ST compound is extremely challenging and leaves translators perplexed.

Let’s consider the following scene.

Situation: Season 1 episode 7. Dr Buke informs a patient about his delicate state.	
Patient: So, what are we gonna do about this, um... hemopneumo-Jurassics?	
Dr Burke: Insert a chest tube to drain the blood, then re-inflate your lung.	
المريض: ماذا سنفعل إذن بشأن... الإستهواء الصدري الجوراسي؟ دكتور بورك: سندخل أنبوبا صدريا لتصريف الدم و إعادة نفخ رئتيك	

According to Urban Dictionary Online, Jurassic means ‘a colossal amount of any substance, or anything of enormous size.’ The compound noun that the patient coins, ‘hemopneumo-Jurassics’, refers to the gigantic size of the spot of blood that blocks his lungs. As an English coined compound word, the term seems awkward and funny. It combines a complex medical term ‘hemopneumo’ with another unusual geological term ‘jurassic’. The subtitler chooses a word for word translation, الإستهواء الصدري الجوراسي, which totally misses the irony of a sophisticated word uttered by a mere common street fighter. But, it is my contention, that it is not in any way the translator’s fault. The linguistic tools MSA offers to its craftsmen are obsolete and unable to cope with the light speed evolution of ST.

6. CONCLUSION

In this article, we have argued that MSA manipulates translators who in turn are obliged to manipulate their translations. MSA is the standard variety of Arabic. But, unlike the standard varieties of other languages, it does not have any native speaker and lacks subsequently the socio-communicative tokens any language has. It also relies in its development on academies and authority references which are the only ones allowed to generate new vocabulary items or expressions. This fact causes a lot of discomfort to Arabic subtitlers as they are supposed to translate from an extremely innovative language.

In this article, we have given instances of this shortcoming of MSA. Abbreviations are subtitled by long expressions which contradicts the rule of subtitling. Instead of making the spoken text shorter, it becomes longer and sometimes very complicated, as is the case with technical abbreviations. Specialized jargons are also problematic. The complication of subtitling them emanates from the inability of MSA to provide appropriate technical jargons because it relies on descriptive translations and transliterations. It is also argued above that compound words are problematic in the process of translation, especially subtitling. MSA is unable to cope with the flexibility and creativity of English and the translation of compound words is a solid argument for this fact. Compound words have become widely used in English. They are very concise and reflect accurate meanings. MSA needs to develop such word combinations to ensure the language development and enable translators to render the source message appropriately and effectively.



REFERENCES

1. Aitchison, Jean. (2001) *Language Change: Progress or Decay?* Cambridge University Press.
2. Alkhoury, Tatiana. (2011) “Le sous-titrage dans le monde arabe : contraintes et créativité”, *Traduction et médias audiovisuels*. Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 79-91.
3. Argeg, G. Mousbah. (2015) *The problems of translating medical terms from English into Arabic*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Durham, UK.
4. Bassnett, Susan. (1991/2005). *Translation Studies*. New York: Routledge.
5. Díaz Cintas, Jorge and Aline, Remael. (2007). *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling*. Manchester: St Jerome.
6. Dressler, Wolfgang. (2006). “Compound Types. In The Representation and Processing of Compound Words”. In Gary Libben and Christina Gagné (eds). Oxford University Press, 23-44
7. Hamaida Lena. (2007). “Subtitling Slang and Dialect.” In *Translation Scenarios: Conference Proceedings*. MuTra, 1-11.
8. http://www.euroconferences.info/proceedings/2007_Proceedings/2007_Hamaidia_Lena.pdf.
9. Kramsch, Claire. (2005). “Post 9/11: Foreign languages between knowledge and power.” *Applied Linguistics*, 26. 545-567. doi:10.1093/applin/ami026. Accessed on January 15th 2019
10. Maamouri, Mohammad. (1998). *Language education and human development: Arabic diglossia and its impact on the quality of education in the Arab Region*. The World Bank: Washington D.C.
11. Newmark, Peter. (1988). *A Textbook of Translation*. London: Prentice Hall.
12. Quirk, Randolph. (1973). *A university Grammar of English Cambridge*. Cambridge University Press. London.
13. Ryding, Karin. C. (2005). *A reference grammar of modern standard Arabic*. Cambridge University Press.
14. Sapir, Edward. (1921). *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
15. Sapir, Edward. (1929). “The Status Of Linguistics As A Science.” In *Language*, 5:4, 207-214
16. Sotiropoulos, Dimitri. (1977). “Diglossia and the National Language Question in Modern Greece.” In *Linguistics*. Mouton Publishers, 5-31.
17. Trudgill, Peter. (1999). “Standard English: what it isn’t.” In Tony Bex and Richard Watts (eds.) *Standard English: the widening debate*. London: Routledge, 117-128.
18. Yaseen, Hiba. (2013). *Terminological inconsistency in medical translation from English into Arabic*. M.A. Thesis. An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine.
19. Zughoul, Mohammad. (1980). “Diglossia in Arabic: Investigating solutions.” *Anthropological Linguistics*, 22:5, 201-217.

Cite this Article: Dr. Abdelouahab ELBAKRI (2021). Is Modern Standard Arabic A Good Language for Subtitling?. *International Journal of Current Science Research and Review*, 4(10), 1220-1228