Article

Between Domestication and Foreignization: A Study of How an Italian Film Remake Got Lost in Translation in the Arab World

Charlene Saad

Abstract: Film remakes represent a form of cinematic translation that reconstructs various elements of the original text. This article relies on the translation strategies of domestication and foreignization to analyze “Ashāb Wālā Ā‘ız”, the Arabic remake of the Italian film “Perfetti Sconosciuti” or “Perfect Strangers”. This study shows that the Arabic remake, which sparked controversy across the Middle East, replicates many of the syntactic elements of the original film, such as the narrative and the plot structure, as well as cinematographic and paralinguistic elements. Still, it attempts to adopt a transformative approach in order to generate a cultural production. The result shows that the use of domestication in film remakes alters the rhetorical effect of the original version and that, although foreignization may promote an audience’s interest in foreign cultures, it may contribute to the reproduction of otherness due to the dissatisfaction of the targeted audiences.

Keywords: film remakes; audiovisual translation; domestication; foreignization; otherness; cross-cultural translation; Perfetti Sconosciuti

1. Introduction

What could possibly “spark controversy” (Fam 2022) and “draw outrage” (Welk 2022) yet be considered a “fresh breath of air” (Twaji 2022) and a “milestone” (Francis 2022) in the Middle East? It is the Arabic film “Ashāb Wālā Ā‘ız”, which is a remake of the Italian film “Perfetti Sconosciuti, or “Perfect Strangers”, released in February 2016 and remade in more than 20 countries. As soon as it was released on Netflix in January 2022, the film immediately sparked a clash of opinions among audiences. Some praised the dialogue and the actors’ performance, and they believed the film raised “real-life topics often ignored” (Ritman 2022). Others, however, expressed their shock and anger towards the narrative, which, in their opinion, does not align with the norms of Arab societies. Negative reactions escalated, and several voices advocated the censorship of the film due to the perceived threats it posed to society, particularly to family and religious values (Fam 2022). Why did people have a negative reaction towards this remake and why did they think of it as culturally inappropriate in a society that has been consuming foreign movies with differing cultural contexts?

A remake creates a new version of an existing film by recreating the story, characters, and, sometimes, the overall concept of the original work. It is typically produced in a different language or cultural context from the original. Translation involves converting a text from one language to another while maintaining the original meaning and intent. In the context of media, translation is commonly used to make foreign-language films accessible to audiences who do not understand the original language. Audiovisual translation studies (Baker and Hochel 1998; Luyken et al. 1991; Karamitrouglou 2000; De Linde and Kay 1999; Pérez-González 2014) have long been concerned with two forms of translation: dubbing and subtitling. While these studies focus on the linguistic features of the text, they ignore its multimodal aspects. However, film and media studies (Auferheide 1998; Wills 1998; Mandiberg 2008; and others) refer to remakes as a form of translation. Both remakes and translations are concerned with dialogue and other textual elements to suit
the target language and audience by working out the intended meaning and cultural nuances. Domestication and foreignization are among the strategies that are used in translation. It was German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher who spoke about them first in 1813. For him, “the translator may leave the author in peace as much as possible and move the reader towards him” (Lefevere 1977, p. 74). In this view, translators resort to foreignization to preserve the foreign nature of the source text despite the unfamiliarity that it encloses. After all, “the properly ethical aim of the translating act is receiving the foreign as foreign” (Berman [1985] 2000, p. 285). In another approach by Schleiermacher, the translator depends on domestication, which is “an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to receiving cultural values, bringing the author back home” (Venuti 1995, p. 15). Even though Schleiermacher provides the translator with a choice, he leans towards foreignized translation in which a cultural other is manifested and respected. Does this imply that this approach is positive while domestication is negative? Of course not. “The deployment of either one or the other approach is to be viewed in relation to the context in which a translation is produced and received as well as to the function it is intended to have” (Ozbot 2016, p. 279).

This paper analyzes the Arabic film “Ašlab Wālā Aʿāz” based on the notions of domestication and foreignization used in translation studies in an attempt to demonstrate the following:
1. How a remake can be considered a form of translation.
2. How the use of foreignization in a film remake can result in a cultural divide between two cultures.
3. How the use of domestication in a remake can affect the communicative purposes of the original film.

2. Culture and Translation

According to the American translation theorist, Eugene Nida, language plays an important role in culture, in that it “carries culture, mirrors culture, spreads culture and helps develop culture” (Nida as mentioned in Wang 2014, p. 2424). Culture shapes language; therefore, dealing with a language means dealing with norms, values, and customs that are necessarily cultural. Since translation is a linguistic activity, it is a fundamentally cultural process. More specifically, translation has become a tool for exchanging information across cultures and a kind of intercultural communication between the source text and the translator on one hand and the translator and the audience on the other hand. The purpose of any communication process is to convey a message between a sender and a speaker. To be successful, it should be audience centered, in that it must take the audience’s needs and expectations into consideration. In modern translation studies, a source text is seen as a dynamic entity and an “offer of information from which the receiver accepts what they want or need” (Nord 2006, p. 132). Different readers receive different messages from the same text because, even though people may belong to the same community, they may have different background knowledge and perceptions of the world. This makes the translator’s task more difficult, particularly when s/he does not belong to the same community and, therefore, cannot really assess how a source text might be received. That said, if a source text aims to achieve a certain communicative purpose in the receiver, a target text certainly has a communicative purpose as well. The question, then, is whether these purposes should converge or diverge. When communication takes place in a specific situation and when situations are embedded in culture, “each communication act is conditioned by the constraints of the situation-in-culture” (Nord 2006, p. 134). A translator’s choice is highly defined by cultural norms, values, and identities (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998), and translations are usually shaped by ideologies and power relations (Venuti 1995).

In audiovisual translation, if domestication is used and the otherness of the source text is adjusted according to the audience’s expectations, then the translator ends up altering otherness. Bringing the source text “as close as possible to the target audience’s background knowledge abandons all attempts to convey the healthy impact of the foreign
culture Strangeness” (Espindola and Vasconcellos 2006, p. 47). However, even though foreignization may enable the target audience to gain understanding of a new culture, it can make them uncomfortable with new values and norms and more resistant to new ideas and different perspectives. In this case, any ethnocentric or racist idea might be reinforced.

3. Remakes and Translation

Film remakes have always offered a rich field for exploration and analysis in film studies. In his book “Film Remakes”, Verevis (2006) defines remakes as “intertextual structures (…) highly particular in their repetition of narrative units, and these repetitions most often (though certainly not always) relate to the content (‘the order of the message’) rather than to the form of the film” (p. 21). He classifies remakes under three main categories, which are industrial, textual, and critical. They are an “established industrial category of textual re-working” (Heinze and Kramer 2015, p. 8), which should be seen as a complex situation that requires special attention to different factors, among which we can name audience expectations as well as dissemination and reception. Other scholars offer taxonomies of remakes. Thomas Leitch (2002) classifies remakes into “readaptations” (which are loyal to the source text), “updates” (which bring the source text to a new context), “homages” (when an earlier and perhaps forgotten source text is highlighted), and “true remakes” (which are likely to replace the source text).

Globalization has led to the proliferation of interlingual remakes, where films are adapted for different cultural audiences. These adaptations raise questions about cultural translation and reception. Given the recent surge in audiovisual content and the rapid growth of streaming platforms and social media in the past few years, audiovisual translation has become a rich area of interest for researchers seeking to understand emerging challenges and strategies. While this domain has mainly been concerned with two forms of translation, subtitling and dubbing, other modes have recently received more attention (Valdeón 2022). However, remakes were rarely mentioned in translation studies (Evans 2018) since scholars did not seem to agree on what to consider audiovisual translation modes. Some researchers believe that remakes are “cinema adaptations in which a new text is based on a previous one, as in the innumerable films based on other films, novels, plays, comics, etc.” (Chaume 2013, p. 116). However, several studies (Gottlieb 2007; Mandiberg 2008; Evans 2014; Yau 2014) have been focusing on remakes as a form of translation since “they replace the units of meaning in one language with units of meaning in another language” (Evans 2018, p. 2). Many film critics examine “the remake as one of many forms and practices of transposition, translation, interpretation, intertextuality, or hypertextuality” (Heinze and Kramer 2015, p. 10). Stam (2000) uses critical theory to study remakes, exploring issues of intertextuality and cultural appropriation (Verevis 2006). The intertext or source text forms a complex network of information that the remake can either adopt, amplify, disregard, subvert, or transform. These transformations occur within the constraints of specific historical circumstances, with the remake executing these changes along multiple dimensions, influenced by factors such as studio style, ideological trends, political limitations, and others (Stam 2000).

Remakes can also be categorized under “multimedia localization”, which consists of adapting multimedia content to make it culturally and linguistically suitable for a specific audience or market. This involves not only translating texts but also adjusting visuals to reach global audiences and promote engagement and understanding. This makes localization fall within the concept of domestication (Chaume 2018, p. 94). Therefore, since translation is no longer seen in its traditional form, and it has widened its horizons to include linguistic and non-linguistic issues, remakes and translation can be related in the context of media and entertainment industries. When a remake is produced in a different language from the original, the dialogue and other linguistic elements need to be translated to suit the target language and audience. The translation process is a multilingual production that recontextualizes a film according to the target culture. This “implies resorting to semiotic and domestic translation modes, and the main feature of
remakes is based on the shifts of cultural elements that are required. (…) the nature of this type arouses some controversy among scholars (Bartolome and Cabrera 2005, p. 100) particularly because it was long believed that translation is only concerned with language. However, modern approaches take into consideration the multimodal aspects of translation “where more than just language is translated” (Evans 2018, p. 3).

Scholars in film studies have resorted to translation to discuss remakes and “demonstrated the relevance of translation theory to film remakes” (Evans 2018, p. 2). Mazdon (2000) and Wang (2008), for instance, refer to Venuti’s notion of foreignizing translation in their discussion of film remakes. When talking about remakes, one should think of fidelity and freedom exactly as occurs in translation. The first is aimed at producing a faithful model by staying as close as possible to the source text while the second is aimed at inspiring a new model. In both cases, “the text being translated ultimately serves to affirm the identity and integrity of the (presumed) original” (Veronis 2006, p. 82).

4. Methodology
4.1. The Arabic Remake

“Perfetti Sconosciuti” is a film by Italian screenwriter and director, Paolo Genovese. Nominated in many film festivals, it gained global recognition and “has been remade more than 20 times since 2016” (The Economist 2023). The main idea of the film is the double face that each one of us has, that one is evident in our daily encounters with family and friends and another that is hidden within our smartphones. The global aspect of the situation spreading across cultural and geographical borders explains the big number of remakes of the Italian film (France 24 2022). This study focuses on the Arabic remake that was released on Netflix in January 2022 in 190 countries.

“Ashab Wala ‘A’az” is a film by Wissam Smayra, a Lebanese director, producer, and writer. “Perfetti Sconosciuti” and “Ashab Wala ‘A’az” both tell the story of seven friends: Eva/May, a therapist, and her husband Rocco/Walid who invite their friends (two married couples and a single man) over dinner on the evening of a lunar eclipse. Everything seems to be in order until Eva says that, in her opinion, many married couples would see their marriages end if they read their partners’ smartphone messages. She suggests that they play a game during which they place their cellphones on the table and share with others any call or message they receive. Some of the attendees are reluctant, but they eventually agree to participate. The game seems harmless and fun at the beginning but soon becomes stressful and destructive when hidden secrets begin emerging to the surface. Sofia/Sofie, Eva/May and Rocco/Walid’s daughter, decides to spend the night with her boyfriend and asks her father to keep a secret from her mother. Bianca/Jana, who is a vet, is married to Cosimo/Ziad, a taxi driver. During dinner, she discovers that he is having an affair with another woman who turns out to be pregnant. Peppe/Rabih, the bachelor of the evening, was expected to arrive with his new girlfriend; however, he arrives alone, pretending that she has a fever. This leaves an empty chair by the table in which the director places his camera, giving the audience the impression that they are a part of the scene. Carlotta/Mariam, an alcoholic, finds out that her husband Lele/Shereef is having an affair with another man. What she does not know is that Lele/Shereef and Peppe/Rabih had swapped their phones because Lele’s mistress sends him a picture of herself every evening. This way, Peppe/Rabih can pretend that the picture is of his new girlfriend. The escalating series of events and deceitful revelations leave the marriages, and even friendships, in a complete wreck. The big surprise is that the film ends as if none of the incidents took place. It turns out that the attendees refused to play the game and that the writers’ aim was to bring our attention to how “mobiles have taken over our lives” (Byrne 2017) and to what could happen if secrets are revealed. Another interesting message we learn at the end of the film is that ignorance is sometimes bliss.

“Ashab Wala ‘A’az” not only repeats the original narrative but also the dialogue. During an interview with France 24, Smayra expressed his admiration for the narrative of the Italian film, and he acknowledged that the original screenplay truly reflected our lives in
a digital-driven world. Film critics criticized Smayra’s work and considered it “mostly copied as it” (Rafik 2022) was “nothing but a dubbed copy of the original” (Talaat 2022) or even “a Google translation” (Talaat 2022), disregarding any contextual or cultural values of the target audience. For them, the film lacked a personal touch, and the actors and actresses even shared noticeable similarities in their features. Smayra mentioned that he chose to abide by the structure of the original version, and he kept a big part of the original screenplay even though some sections were removed. Therefore, the Arabic remake offered a repetition and reworking of the source text (ST).

Remaking is a “reading and rereading of the original text” (Eberwein, as cited in Verevis 2006, p. 81). It is more or less transformative. It comes in different variations and can result from different reasons and motivations. “The process of remaking is usually conceived in terms of translating rather than copying, so that a remake is never completely identical with the text it remakes” (Heinze and Kramer 2015, p. 12).

4.2. Data Sources

Data were collected through the following sources:

1. An analysis of two screenplays, one Italian and one Arabic. The first is retrieved from the website Sceneggiature Italiane or Italian Screenplays (Sceneggiature Italiane 2016), an initiative by the Association of Film and Television Authorship. The second is retrieved from the film itself.

2. A shot-by-shot analysis in which the original and the target narrative and cinematic elements are compared to demonstrate how the Arabic remake was shaped and how cultural aspects were treated. Film translation involves “the rendering of various cultural data (conventions, habits and items typical of the local sociocultural environment)” (Delabastita 1990, p. 102). Remakes usually translate all these data through a repetition of verbal and nonverbal signs and a rework of the source text.

The comparative analysis of the Italian source text (ST) and the Arabic target text (TT) films is carried out to examine how the TT diverges from or converges with the ST. For this purpose, Venuti’s (1995) notions of domestication (omission, addition, or substitution instances) and foreignization (repetition of foreign cultural items) are taken into consideration. Some examples of dialogue and narrative variations are included. A close examination of some culture-specific elements, which usually pose a translation problem, shows the kind of treatment they received and how otherness was represented.

5. Findings and Discussion

In the following sections, I present examples of some of the similarities and differences observed in both films at aesthetic and linguistic levels.

5.1. Cinematic Aesthetics

“Perfetti Sconosciuti” highlights modern social issues through an engaging cinematic approach. The characters’ use of smartphones and the consequences of their secrets being exposed emphasize the film’s thematic exploration of technology and interpersonal relationships. The film is a single location piece where all the events take place in one geographical space. It presents both challenges and advantages that serve the story. Working within the constraints of a confined space, the writer usually faces the challenge of creating a compelling scenario to keep the audience’s attention during the film. Also, the director has to find ways of shooting scenes that should not be repetitive or boring. The choice of the setting creates an intimate atmosphere that intensifies the emotional tension, and the use of the lunar eclipse reflects the idea that hidden secrets are about to surface. The Arabic remake enhances this atmosphere with a complex musical overture that sets the mood of the film, anticipating mystery and creating drama and suspense. Out of insistent rhythmic chords that announce a major event, a sad violin tune emerges, representing the human vulnerability that the other instruments are trying to hide. By contrast, the Italian musical theme seems simpler and lighter, and the lunar eclipse is not given the same importance.
as in the Arabic version, where the news anchor, in the first scene, refers to it as a rare astrological event. The change observed in the main musical theme is necessarily cultural because, even though human feelings are universal, their expression and experience vary across cultures.

The difference in the mood between the two films can also be felt in the titles. The Italian title “Perfetti Sconosciuti” means “perfect strangers”, and it “seems better and more indicative of the content of the film since it reveals how apart we are from each other no matter how intimate we might be” (Saleh 2022). The Arabic title “Āṣhab Wala Āẓ” is a Lebanese cultural expression that is widely used in informal contexts, and it usually means “best buddies”. However, it is used sarcastically in the film context to mean the opposite. In the end, the buddies were never real buddies.

Both films are characterized by long takes, with the camera moving fluidly between characters as they engage in heated discussions and debates. As the characters’ secrets are revealed, the tension gradually builds, and the lighting becomes progressively intense, underscoring drama and tension. The focus in both films is on capturing the actors’ performances, and the characters are often framed in tight close-ups that accentuate their facial expressions and body language. This intensity is heightened in the Arabic remake compared to the original.

5.2. Narrative and Dialogue

In the case of “Āṣhab Wala Āẓ”, where the remake closely follows the original structure and translates different components of the film such as the narrative and the dialogue, there were some variations in terms of space, text, culture, ideologies, and other. Some of the differences between the two films can be seen in the following sections.

5.2.1. A Conservative Culture

One significant difference between the Italian and the Arabic films lies in their approaches to portraying sexual content. The Arabic remake shies away from some explicit displays of affection, opting instead for omissions or substitutions. According to Santademilia (2014), societies, in general, impose moral and ethical boundaries on language and discourse in their need to define what is decent and acceptable. This is particularly true in conservative societies that are governed by religious values and principles, and where the socio-cultural perception of sex is conceived differently. Translating sexual content is “a political act, with important rhetorical and ideological implications, and is fully indicative of the translator’s attitude towards existing conceptualizations of gender/sexual identities, human sexual behavior(s) and society’s moral norms” (Santademilia 2014). This resulted in a kind of self-censorship in the Arabic remake that could be seen in the following examples:

Omission 1: During one of the dinner conversations, Rocco/Walid receives a call from his daughter, Sofia/Sofie, who reaches out to him to discuss the possibility of spending the night at her boyfriend’s place. This scene portrays an understanding and supportive father who actively engages in the conversation, offering guidance to help his daughter make the right decision. However, there is a notable difference in the script between the two versions. In the Italian film, we learn during the conversation that it was Rocco who had given Sofia the box of condoms, while in the remake, this part is omitted because certain cultural boundaries had to be observed. This highlights a distinct cultural contrast between Italians and Arabs. The use of the domestication approach in this case was certainly aimed at avoiding cultural insensitivity. However, the Arabic remake faced online criticism for going against the traditional role of an Arab patriarch, which involves safeguarding the honor of his family (Shaheen 2022). Arab fathers are often perceived as exceptionally protective of their daughters; therefore, showing Walid as a supportive and progressive father is already a deviation from the prevailing Arab mindset. This poses one of the challenges that may arise when using foreignization and retaining cultural elements from the source text. In such cases, the target audience may be less willing to adapt or change their perspectives in response to different ideas.
Omission 2: When Carlotta/Mariam receives a message on Facebook from someone asking her if she is wearing underwear, Lele/Shereef hands her the cellphone. He persistently seeks to ascertain whether she is wearing underwear. While Carlotta complies and lifts her dress in front of the others, Mariam refrains from doing so. This highlights a notable contrast between the Italian and Arabic versions. In the Italian version, this scene suggests a degree of comfort with nudity. However, in the Arabic version, the acceptance of nudity is quite different, and actions like these are considered entirely unacceptable. Arabic society is known for its strong conservatism, and such scenes are generally not accepted. Hence, the Arabic remake adheres to the cultural norms on sexual content that are prevalent in the Arabic context.

Substitution 1: When Carlotta and Lele arrive, Eva tells them both that she found condoms in her daughter’s purse. However, May discreetly whispers the information to Mariam. In the Arab world, such topics are not supposed to be openly discussed.

Substitution 2: When Bianca/Jana’s ex-boyfriend sends her a message, she tries to clarify the situation to her husband Cosimo/Ziad. However, he remains unconvinced. Here is what he says:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Text</th>
<th>Target Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;secondo me questo ti si vorrebbe trombare ancora&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;له عم حس إydropha بعد عليه&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I think he would like to fuck you again).</td>
<td>(Why do I have the impression that this guy is still in love with you?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the example above, it is evident that the message conveyed in both sentences differs significantly. While the first one refers to a physical sexual relationship, the second emphasizes the concept of love. This translation approach reflects the challenges that the Lebanese director and his writing team must have gone through due to social constraints, ultimately leading to a domesticated translation. However, in other scenes, many foreign cultural elements were retained, and it is obvious that the foreignization approach played a role in creating a sense of threat to one’s identity. When individuals feel that their values and identities are challenged, they may become more resistant to different perspectives and reluctant to interact or accept individuals from different cultures. The following two Arabic scenes were retained from the original:

1. Eva/May finds condoms in her daughter’s purse and asks her if she is involved in a sexual relationship with her boyfriend. Then, she discusses the issue with her husband who seems to accept the situation. Arab fathers do not typically tolerate their daughters engaging in sexual relationships before marriage. Therefore, the audience regarded the father’s attitude in the remake as challenging their moral values.

2. Mariam removes her underwear from beneath her dress before leaving the house. This segment, which closely repeats the original, sparked outrage among the audience, who felt offended and described the scene as undermining traditional values. Mona Zaki, the Egyptian actress playing the role of Mariam in the remake received harsh criticism and was accused of negatively representing Egyptian women and “being part of an overseas agenda to force social change” (Ritman 2022). Consequently, a considerable number of Egyptians and conservative leaders called for the importance of banning the film.

5.2.2. A Patriarchal Culture

Another important difference between the two versions lies in how they portray gender roles. As Naggar (2022) points out, “in Lebanon and the Arab region in general, traditions expect women to submit to men”. In these cultures, the man is traditionally considered the head of the family and the primary financial provider. “Accordingly, he has the authority to control female family members” (Naggar 2022). In that sense, “the traditional Arab
father has authority and responsibility… expects respect and unquestioning compliance” (Barakat, as cited in Joseph 1996, p. 14). This system is witnessed throughout the Arab world “because the family is the basic unit of the society” (Joseph 1996, p. 15). As a result, the remake includes the following additions and omissions:

Addition 1: When Eva/May confronts her daughter Sofia/Sofie upon finding condoms in her purse, the dialogue remains consistent between the two versions. However, in the remake, May threatens Sofie, indicating that she might inform her father about the issue. In the patriarchal context of Arabic society, the father embodies an authoritative figure who instills fear in children. Eventually, Eva/May ends up telling Rocco/Walid about the condoms she found in Sofia/Sofie’s purse. May aims to prompt her husband to take action. Here is what she says:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Text</th>
<th>Target Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eva to Rocco:</td>
<td>May to Walid:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inexistant sentence</td>
<td>“بتلآفت فتاتة ولد. بدائ تروح تقلًا إنه مسوغ تعبر الليلة”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Your daughter is indecent Walid. You will tell her she is forbidden to go out tonight)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the example above, there is a clear allusion to the traditional mindset in a patriarchal society and an inherent gender role assumption. In this society, mothers may resort to threatening children when they encounter resistance in enforcing rules, often implying that they will involve the father. Fathers, in turn, are expected to be firm. This addition to the Arabic dialogue represents a rethinking and recontextualization of the original to better align with the culture it represents. In this case, the dialogue is “double-coded, pointing both back to the source film and to themselves” (Evans 2018, p. 16).

Addition 2: With May, Walid discusses the difference in how she worries about Sofie compared to how his own mother never worried about him. May attributes this distinction to the fact that Walid is a boy. As previously mentioned, in patriarchy, men have power, which often translates into having the right to do as they please. An intriguing aspect in the Arabic remake lies in May’s reflection on the role of mothers. She may have experienced oppressive traditions and she may have managed to become strong and professionally independent, yet she still finds it acceptable to request that her husband control their daughter’s life. This aspect is a compelling subject for further socio-cultural research.

Addition 3: When Lele/Shereef finds out that a man is asking his wife on Facebook if she is wearing underwear, Lele expresses his disappointment and simply walks away. However, Shereef resorts to violence, pulling Mariam out of the bathroom and shouting at her. This difference shows that, in Arabic societies, sexual matters define a man’s honor, pride, and reputation, and when those are compromised, he is expected to react violently. It also highlights the idea that the Arabic female’s behavior directly affects the reputation of her husband, father, or brother. The Italian version shows that Lele is disappointed with his wife’s behavior, but Shereef, in the Arabic version, resorts to aggressive measures to protect his reputation.

Omission 1: in the Italian film, Lele uses the word “amore” (love) several times when addressing his wife, even though their marriage is experiencing difficulties. On the other hand, Shereef adopts a more aggressive and sarcastic tone towards his wife. He appears to have little tolerance for her presence and seizes every opportunity to criticize her. The use of domestication in representing Mariam and Shereef’s relationship overlooked the rhetorical effect that was conveyed while watching the original.

Omission 2: Among the sections that are omitted in the target text is when Carlotta and Lele are on their way to join the others for dinner. Lele expresses curiosity about why they named their son “Bruno”, even though neither his father nor father-in-law bears that name. He even asks Carlotta not to challenge his mother’s opinions. This car dialogue is entirely omitted in the remake, although it resonates well within Arabic society where it
is customary to name children after their grandparents. Also, husbands often emphasize the importance of their wives showing respect to their mothers-in-law and being more considerate in their interactions.

5.2.3. A Never-Ending Conflict

Another cultural aspect of Arabic society revolves around the ongoing conflict between a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law. This relationship is often governed by a constant struggle for control and dominance. It is obvious that there is a sense of discomfort between Carlotta and her mother-in-law, who boasts about her expertise in putting children to bed when Carlotta asks her children to sleep early. Carlotta accuses her of spoiling the children, but she appears more composed in her interactions compared to Mariam, who is constantly upset with her mother-in-law’s interference and unsolicited opinions. For instance, as Mariam prepares Mouloukhiya, an Egyptian meal, for dinner, her mother-in-law advises her that it must be served hot. Another instance of tension between the two women arises when Mariam asks her children not to spend too much time on their tablets. Her mother-in-law says that these devices are definitely detrimental to their brains. Mariam expresses her frustration to Shereef, telling him that what is truly at risk of harming the children’s brains are the sweets that his mother offers them. These additions clearly demonstrate that the Arabic remake placed greater emphasis on this relationship compared to the Italian version.

5.2.4. Culture and Profanity

The remake has a number of swear words, and the language used has been classified as offensive and inappropriate by many who argue that such dialogue "does not suit the nature of the Arab societies that are governed by customs and traditions" (Dssouki 2022, para. 8). Lebanese director Wissam Smayra, however, holds a different perspective, asserting that "the language of the film is the one that friends use when they meet over dinner or lunch. We presented reality as it is" (Emaratlyoum 2022, para. 6). He also expressed his surprise towards the audience’s acceptance of American swear words, for example, and their rejection of some Arabic swear words and insults that they frequently use in their daily lives. In the following, I provide examples of some of these words that were added in the Arabic dialogue.

Example 1: when Eva/May learns that her daughter is going out with her boyfriend, she tells her husband about it:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Text</th>
<th>Target Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eva to Rocco:</td>
<td>May to Walid:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“esce con Gregorio”</td>
<td>&quot;ضِحَيتَة بِمَع هِدَى جِبَلٍ صَاحِبَهُ الخَمَرَ الْبَلَّاق&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(She is going out with Gregorio)</td>
<td>(She is going out with the so-called Jilou, her stupid brainless boyfriend).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When comparing the source text to the target text in the example above, it becomes clear that it is common that a teenage girl goes out with her boyfriend in Italy. The line is straightforward: “she is going out with Gregorio”. By contrast, the Arabic line reads, “she is going out with the so-called Jilou, her stupid brainless boyfriend”. This difference clearly shows that it is considered inappropriate for a teenage girl to have a boyfriend in Arab cultures, where relationships at such a young age are viewed as meaningless, and girls are expected to establish boundaries for boys.

Example 2: When Bianca/Jana’s ex-boyfriend sends her a message, she tries to explain to her husband Cosimo/Ziad that her ex-boyfriend is in love with someone else:
In this example, the text undergoes a meaningful recontextualization. In the Italian version, love is celebrated, while suffering is portrayed negatively. However, in the Arabic version, love itself is depicted as a negative and humiliating emotion. This contrasting perception of love stems from the differences between Arabic and Italian mentalities in society. In an Arabic society, men are expected to be strong. From a young age, boys are taught to hide their feelings “if they want to be perceived as big boys” (Khalife 2019). The only emotion they can display is anger, as it is associated with masculinity. Love, on the other hand, brings them feelings of shame and humiliation. Arabic viewers could connect with this scene, but they did not fully grasp the rhetorical impact of the original simile, “suffering like a dog,” which conveys the profound hardship experienced by Bianca’s ex-boyfriend due to his love. This simile invokes the imagery and sensation of a profound struggle. By contrast, the Arabic simile, which alludes to the act of desperately chasing after someone, is considered humiliating in Lebanese culture, as it implies a loss of dignity and self-respect.

Example 3: Upon their arrival, Bianca and Cosimo present a bottle of the drink that they brought, but Rocco does not seem satisfied:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Text</th>
<th>Target Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Ma che è un amaro che ci porti una bottiglia sola?”</td>
<td>“فنجية واحدة يا كحلي؟”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(But is it an Amaro so that you’re bringing us only one bottle?)</td>
<td>(You brought one bottle, you stingy?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘كحلي’ (Khty) is a negative word in Arabic that belongs to the Lebanese dialect. It is used to refer to someone who is stingy. It is absent in the original text, although one can tell from Rocco’s intonation that he thinks that Cosimo is stingy.

Example 4: When Eva/May proposes the game, Mariam displays greater enthusiasm compared to Carlotta. She addresses May by exclaiming the word “سائعة” (sāyā) three times. “Sāyā” is an Egyptian colloquial word that, according to Word Reference Forum (2006), typically denotes someone who is “reckless or evilly smart” or simply “naughty”.

In all of the findings and examples above, foreignization and domestication methods were examined to understand how the cultural aspects of the Italian film were translated. The remake repeated several elements of the original, most importantly the narrative, in all its details, and the dialogue. On the other hand, it recreated some parts based on the degree of acceptability of foreignness by the Arabic audience. However, alternating between foreignness and familiarity in “Ajaxāb Wālā Āʿāz” had a backlash effect. Instead of fostering cultural diversity, foreignization ended up promoting ethnocentric views in Arabic audiences. After all, “one same thing in different cultural backgrounds may give people different cultural connotations and resonations” (Wang 2010, p. 6) because their perception of the world is influenced by a number of factors, namely religion, traditions, history, or geography. On the other hand, the frequent use of domestication undoubtedly facilitated smoother communication and familiarity. However, it often disregarded the cultural and value nuances of the source culture. Given that language inherently serves a communicative function, it consequently diminished its rhetorical impact.

The resistance to “Ajaxāb Wālā Āʿāz” and to what it represents primarily stems from the audience’s difficulty in accepting scenes in which Arabic actors and actresses, who
are known for their traditional cinematic roles, engage in what is perceived as provocative content that challenges traditional values. The remake included discussions about relationships, sexuality, and personal choices, which are often approached from a more conservative perspective in Arab societies. The film’s portrayal of these topics led to debates about whether it aligned with the cultural values of the region.

6. Conclusions

“Remakes often vary significantly from their source texts, adding or removing parts and generally adapting the text for the target location” (Evans 2018, p. 16). In this study, the cultural elements that were identified were either domesticated through substitution or omission or foreignized through an exact reproduction or a close adaptation. “Âšlāb Wala A az” reproduces and sometimes recontextualizes “Perfetti Sconosciuti” similarly to the reproduction and recontextualization used in translation. It cannot be regarded as an exact copy of the Italian film, as translation goes beyond replication. The relationship between the two films “is not limited to similarity, though clearly some similarity is necessary for the text to be recognized as a remake or translation” (Evans 2014, p. 309). Unlike dubbing and subtitling, a remake has the ability to translate many levels of a film that go beyond linguistic aspects, and it can adopt many of the approaches used in literary translations.

In film remakes, translation is a complex decision-making process that necessitates a careful selection of the most appropriate approach. Foreignization can be a powerful tool in preventing discrimination and fostering cultural understanding, conveying the “otherness” of the source culture. However, prioritizing the source culture and its values by not imposing the target culture’s norms and values onto the source text may reinforce cultural stereotypes and biases, as seen in the Arabic remake, which generated criticism. On the other hand, adopting domestication as a translation strategy makes the film more culturally suitable for the target audience, although it may result in some loss of the original intended meaning and may fail to introduce the target audience to different perspectives. While both foreignization and domestication present advantages and disadvantages, finding a balance between them is crucial when adapting a screenplay in a remake. The choice of translation strategy depends on several factors, namely the narrative’s nature, the preferences of the target audience, and the anticipated impact of the remake. The result of mixing cultures in translation is “an unstable balance of power which will depend to a great extent on the relative weight of the exporting culture as it is felt in the receiving culture” (Franco Aixelá 1996, p. 52). Therefore, accepting or transforming the other is a choice that reflects the level of tolerance to cultural differences within the target audience. This is particularly seen in remakes that become a complex process, as in the case of “Âšlāb Wala A az” discussed in this paper. After all, the reception of any film is significantly shaped by cultural contexts, which can lead to various interpretations and controversies.

The notion of the “other” is the essence of any translation and is embedded within each linguistic community (Franco Aixelá 1996). Since what unites us is greater than what divides us, film remakes as a mode of translation are significant tools to overcome boundaries and present our diversity in a positive way. Conducting further research on this type of film is important for exploring ways to present otherness as an enriching rather than a threatening quality or state.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: The author expresses gratitude to Bilyana Todorova for her motivating invitation to contribute to this special issue, and to the anonymous reviewers whose insightful feedback has significantly enriched the content of this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.
Between Domestication and Foreignization: A Study of How an Italian Film Remake Got Lost in Translation in the Arab World

Abstract:

The Arabic remake of "Perfect Strangers" sparked controversy and drew outrage in the Arab World. This study shows that the use of domestication in the Arabic remake to analyze "ṣḥāṣḥā" or "ṣḥāṣḥāt" in the context of media, translation is commonly used to make foreign-language text from one language to another while maintaining the original meaning and intent. In this case, the use of domestication in translation to analyze the Arabic remake of the Italian film "Perfect Strangers" to the Arab World illustrates the challenges of translation in a cross-cultural context. The study examines how the Arabic remake of the film altered the rhetorical elements of the original film, focusing on the thematic and narrative changes. It also discusses the impact of cultural and linguistic differences on the translation process.

Keywords: Translation, History and Culture

Charleine Saad
Independent Researcher, Byblos 1120, Lebanon; charleine.saad@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Film remakes are a well-known phenomenon in the entertainment industry. They are adaptations of existing films in different language or cultural contexts. The Semiotics of Subtitling by Amara (1999) highlights the importance of translation in film adaptation. Subtitling involves the process of converting a film into a different language or cultural context while maintaining the original meaning and intent. However, this process is not always straightforward, especially when dealing with cultural and linguistic differences. This study aims to explore the impact of domestication in the Arabic remake of the Italian film "Perfect Strangers" and its reception in the Arab World.

Dissouki (2022) discusses the differences between foreignization and domestication in translation. Foreignization involves converting foreign words into foreign words, whereas domestication involves converting foreign words into domestic words. In the film "Perfect Strangers," the use of domestication is evident in the Arabic remake. This study examines how the use of domestication in the Arabic remake of "Perfect Strangers" affects the reception of the film in the Arab World.

2. Foreignization and Domestication

Foreignization and domestication are two dominant strategies in translation. Foreignization involves maintaining the foreignness of the original text by using foreign words and expressions. Domestication involves converting foreign words and expressions into domestic words and expressions. In film adaptation, foreignization and domestication can be used to adapt the film to a different cultural context. This study examines how the use of domestication in the Arabic remake of "Perfect Strangers" affects the reception of the film in the Arab World.

3. Conclusion

The Arabic remake of "Perfect Strangers" sparked controversy and drew outrage in the Arab World. This study shows that the use of domestication in the Arabic remake to analyze "ṣḥāṣḥā" or "ṣḥāṣḥāt" in the context of media, translation is commonly used to make foreign-language text from one language to another while maintaining the original meaning and intent. In this case, the use of domestication in translation to analyze the Arabic remake of the Italian film "Perfect Strangers" to the Arab World illustrates the challenges of translation in a cross-cultural context. The study examines how the Arabic remake of the film altered the rhetorical elements of the original film, focusing on the thematic and narrative changes. It also discusses the impact of cultural and linguistic differences on the translation process.
Charleine Saad
Independent Researcher, Byblos 1120, Lebanon; charleine.saad@gmail.com

Abstract: This study shows that the Arabic remake, which sparked controversy in the Middle East? It is the Arabic film remakes alters the rhetorical effect of the original version. The film immediately sparked a clash of opinions among audiences. Some praised the dialect and the acting, while others criticized the lack of serious narrative, which, in their opinion, does not align with the norms of Arab societies. Negative public reactions escalated, and several voices advocated the censorship of the film. The Economist (2023) already pointed out that Perfect Strangers has been remade more than 20 times since 2016. It is the Arabic remake that has generated the most amount of controversy and outrage in the Middle East. It is also the film that has been the subject of censorship. The controversy generated by the film raises the question of whether remakes, which are supposed to create new versions of the original, really achieve this goal. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the reproduction of otherness due to the dissatisfaction of the targeted audiences.

Keywords: Arabic remake, Perfect Strangers, domestication, foreignization, rhetorical effect, cultural context.


Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.