

**THE TRANSLATION
STRATEGIES OF SWEARING
AND TABOO EXPRESSIONS
FROM ENGLISH INTO ARABIC
IN SARAH KANE'S (BLASTED)**

استراتيجيات ترجمة الشتائم والتعبيرات المحرمة من الإنجليزية
إلى العربية في رواية سارة كين (بلاستيد)

by

Lecturer :Fouad Adil Khalaf

Tikrit University – College of Arts

Email : fouadadel@tu.edu.iq

المدرس : فؤاد عادل خلف

جامعة تكريت – كلية الاداب





المخلص

تشير الألفاظ البذيئة والمحرمة إلى الكلمات التي تحمل معنىً مسيئاً أو تُشعر بالحرج. وتمثل ترجمتها من لغة إلى أخرى مشكلةً صعبة، إذ قد تكون غير مقبولة ضمن فئة اجتماعية معينة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة استراتيجيات الترجمة المستخدمة لنقل الألفاظ البذيئة والمحرمة من لغة المصدر إلى لغة الهدف. جُمعت بيانات الدراسة من كتاب -بلاستيد- لسارة كين وترجمته إلى العربية. وتشمل هذه البيانات الألفاظ البذيئة والمحرمة في النص المصدر وترجمتها في لغة الهدف. يُفترض أن بعض استراتيجيات الترجمة تُستخدم بشكل أكثر تكراراً من غيرها، وأن ترجمة بعض الكلمات البذيئة قد تنطوي على استخدام أكثر من استراتيجية ترجمة في آنٍ واحد. يُثبت تحليل البيانات المُختارة فرضيات الدراسة، ويخلص إلى أن استراتيجيات الترجمة الحرفية والشرح والتكافؤ هي الأكثر شيوعاً في ترجمة الألفاظ البذيئة في النص الأدبي من الإنجليزية إلى العربية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المحرمات، الشتائم، استراتيجيات الترجمة، الاختلافات الثقافية، سارة كين، بلاستيد.

Abstract

Swearing and taboo expressions refer to the words that indicate offensive meaning or embarrassment. Translating them from one language to another presents a challenging problem as they can be unacceptable within a social group. The current study aims at investigating the translation strategies that can be used to render swearing and taboo expressions from the source language to the target one. The data of the study are collected from Sarah Kane's *Blasted* and its translation into Arabic. The data comprise the swearing and taboo expressions of the source text and their translation in the target one. It is hypothesized that some translation strategies are used more frequently than others, and that the translation of some taboo words can involve the use of more than one translation strategy simultaneously. The analysis of the selected data verifies the hypotheses of the study and comes out with the finding that the strategies of literal translation, explication, and equivalence are more frequent in the translation of taboo expressions in the literary text from English into Arabic.

Key words: Taboo, Swearing, Translation strategies, Cultural differences, Sarah Kane, *Blasted*.

1. Introduction

Swearing words and taboo expressions have attracted the attention of scholars in the field of translation (Goddard, 2015; Hawel, 2019; Díaz-Pérez, 2020). Goddard (2015, p. 213) states that swearing words have a vital role in expressing and managing personal and interpersonal activities as well as "fulfilling important social functions". They give



valuable information about individuals' social classes that is crucial in understanding their social background (Díaz-Pérez, 2020, p. 416). The swear words and vulgarization are commonly used in drama dialogues (Ali & Mewada, 2024, p. 10). However, the translation of swearing words from one language into another presents a challenging problem because of the cultural and social differences between the languages. Therefore, the current study investigates the challenges of translating such words from English into Arabic in the language of drama.

As for the taboo expressions, they are usually considered as inseparable part of any language. They can comprise any activity, subject, or a word that a person in a community avoids because of the fact that they can result in an offensive or embarrassing impact (Díaz-Pérez, 2020, p. 416). Taking into account the common use of the taboo expressions in drama, and that one dramatic text can be rendered to different languages, studies must be conducted in this area to determine the way or the translation strategies that are effectively used in translating these expressions into different linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, the current study investigates the strategies of translating the swearing and taboo expressions from English into Arabic Sarah Kane's *Blasted*.

Sarah Kane is one of the most prominent British playwrights of the 1990s. She is known for her plays that mostly have the feature of violence. She is regarded as an outstanding prototypical character in the theatre of *In-Yer-Face*. She is considered one of the greatest thoughtful British playwrights and undeniably the most radical female (Saunders, 2002, p. 134). *Blasted* is the first play that is written by Sarah Kane in 1995. In *Blasted*, there is neither linear arrangement of time nor static settings. The drama deals with issues such as death, hooliganism, suicide, war, torture, rape, and abusive relations. In *Blasted*, Kane wants to demonstrate that the lives of individuals can be thrown into total disturbance with no encouragement. In addition, Kane wants to exhibit the destructive definition of violence for the audience and readers as she declared that violence, taboo, and swearing are the most crucial issues that must be investigated in the world (Kane, 2001, p. x).

2. Review of Literature

Swearing and taboo expressions are inseparable components of ant language. These



expressions involve the words and phrases that a person avoids due to their offensive and embarrassing impact. According to Ljung (2011, pp. 184-185), these expressions can be classified into five general types or themes. They are the “religious theme, scatological theme, reproductive organ theme, sexual activities theme, and finally the mother theme”. They involve “the utterance of words or expressions considered taboo” (Sahari, 2025, p. 2). Taboo expressions are regularly considered shocking, rude, or offensive. The vagueness and duality of the nature of taboo expressions deepen the problem of their rendering between different languages.

Different studies have investigated the strategies of rendering the swearing and taboo expressions from English into Arabic. Debbas and Haider (2020) investigate the cultural challenges of translating the swear words and taboo expressions in the American animated series Family Guy. They find out that such challenges of translation can be attributed to the cultural differences between the audience of the source language and the target one. Owing to these challenges, the translators are usually compelled to use certain translation strategies such as omission or resorting to euphemistic expressions.

Moreover, Abdelaal and Al Sarhani (2021) examine the challenges that translators come cross when translating swear words from English into Arabic in the movie “Training Day”, and the translation strategies used to overcome these challenges. The analysis of the selected data reveals that translators usually use omission and euphemism in rendering the swear words and taboo expressions from English into Arabic. They attribute the use of these strategies to the “cultural constraints, as the translator observed the target culture constraints that sometimes make it difficult to render some swear and taboo words into Arabic, especially those which are perceived as very pejorative and unacceptable” (Abdelaal & Al Sarhani, 2021, p. 9). Thereupon, the present study investigates translation strategies of rendering the swearing words and taboo expressions in the dramatic text Blasted. Thus, a number of translation strategies are reviewed in the presents study to be investigated in the selected data. Lörcher (1991, p. 76) states that a translation strategy involves a “potentially conscious procedure for resolving a problem encountered by an individual when translating a segment of text from one language into another”. This proposes that some



strategies of translation may be used unconsciously during the process of translation. Whether translation strategies are consciously or unconsciously employed, they have a significant influence on perception of the translated text. Several scholars in the arena of translation have proposed different classifications to the strategies of translation, including Newmark (1981), Levý, althoff and Vidal. (2012), and Venuti (2017). Díaz-Cintas (2009, p. 45) presents eight strategies that can be used in translating the swear words and the taboo expressions. The translation strategies are as follows:

1. Omission, which includes completely omitting the cultural connotation of an expression.
2. Literal translation, where the source text closely or literally translated into the target text as much as possible.
3. Borrowing, where terms of the original text are borrowed to be used in the target text.
4. Equivalence, where the translation of the source text can carry a similar function and meaning in the target culture.
5. Adaptation, where the translation is accustomed to align with the target text and culture to induce similar meanings to the original one.
6. Replacement of the cultural term with deictics.
7. Generalization involves the neutralization of the translation of some of the terms used in the source text.
8. Explication, which characteristically involves rephrasing to explain the cultural terms of the source text in the target one.

To address the aims of the present study, the aforementioned strategies of translation are employed in the analysis of the translation of the swearing and taboo expressions from English into Arabic in Blasted.

3. Research Methodology

The data of the current study are collected from Sarah Kane's Blasted and its Arabic translation, مدمرون. The latter is translated by Abdul Razzaq Belhashmi and is reviewed by Nawaf Bakri. The data consist of swearing words and taboo expressions in the English text and their corresponding translation in Arabic. The analysis of the selected data involves identifying the swearing words and the taboo expressions, their



translation, and the translation strategy used in each translation. The strategies of translation are "omission, borrowing, equivalence, adaptation, replacement, generalization, and explication". The data of the present study are analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The qualitative analysis involves explaining the way the translation strategies are used in translation. One example of the taboo expressions and swearing words is selected to be examined in details. The quantitative analysis involves figuring out the frequencies and percentages of the used translation strategies.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

In *Blasted*, the extract "Hate this city. Stinks. Wogs and Pakis taking over" is translated as "أكره هذه المدينة. رائحتها كريهة. يسودها سمر البشرة من الشرق اوسطيين الاندال والباكستانيين الحقراء", using the strategies of equivalence and explication simultaneously. The strategy of equivalence involves translating the taboo expression "wog" as "الاندال". However, the translation of this phrase is explicated and paraphrased in the target text where the phrase "سمر البشرة من الشرق اوسطيين" is added to the translation to make the translation more comprehensible and contextually meaningful. It is also added to explain the reference of the taboo word "wog". Moreover, the taboo expression "الحقراء" is also added to the target text so that the translation can convey a similar meaning to the source one.

The example "Don't be fucking stupid" is translated as "لا تكوني غبية" by using the strategies of literal translation and omission. The strategy of literal translation is used in translating the taboo expression "stupid" into "غبية". The translation of this word as such can be understood by the target readers because the word "غبي" can be used in Arabic language to describe someone who is stupid. However, in translating this extract, the strategy of omission is also used where the word "fucking" is omitted or untranslated into the target text. The untranslatability of the taboo expression in this context can be attributed to the cultural differences between the source language and the target one.

The strategy of explication is used in translating the phrase "You're just too thick to understand" into "انت ثخينة الرأس" where the taboo expression "thick" used in this context is translated with explication by adding the word "الرأس" to the target text. This addition can explicate that the word "thick" is intended to describe a person who



cannot understand something easily. The word "الراس" is not found in the source text, but it is added to the target one so that the target reader can understand what the word "thick" is intended to mean in this context. Therefore, the word "الراس" is added just only as explication.

Moreover, the strategy of generalization is used in translating the phrase "The wog" into "الشرق اوسطيين الحقراء" where the speaker in the play uses it to describe certain group of people, but in the translation process, it is generalized to describe the whole community of the middle east. The use of this strategy enables the readers of the target text who is intended by using the taboo word "wog". Moreover, using this strategy, the translator can avoid using notes in the translation to tell the reader who is the intended to be described as "wog" in the play, particularly in this context.

In the translation of the phrase "Lucky bastard", the translator uses the strategy of literal translation to render it as "وغد محظوظ" where the taboo word "bastard" is translated as "وغد". The use of this strategy can be attributed to the fact that the word "وغد" has the same cultural reference or meaning in Arabic as the word "bastard" in English. Therefore, using this strategy, the target text still matches the source one. Moreover, the target reader can still get the same meaning.

The strategy of adaptation is used in translating the phrase "I'm fucked" into "لقد قضي علي" where the translation is adapted to align with the target language and culture. The translation of this phrase literally can communicate a very bad meaning to the target readers. Therefore, the adaptation strategy is used to make the target text culturally more acceptable.

It is worth noting that the strategies of borrowing and replacement are not used in translating the work under investigation. The other examples of the taboo expressions and swearing words in the drama are listed in table 1. The table involves the English taboo expressions, the Arabic translation of each, and the translation strategies used to render each expression. The translation of some examples involves the use of more than one translation strategy at the same time.

Table 1. The taboo expression and swearing words in Sarah Kane's Blasted.

The English swearing and taboo expressions	The Arabic translation	The
--	------------------------	-----



translation strategy (s)

Wog النذل Equivalence

Hate this city. Stinks. Wogs and Pakis taking over أكره هذه المدينة. رائحتها كريهة.
يسودها سمر البشرة من الشرق اوسطيين الاندال والباكستانيين الحقراء
Equivalence and Explication

You a nigger-lover? هل انت من محبي الزنوج؟ Literal translation

You like our coloured brethren? هل تحبين إخواننا السود Literal translation

Aye. Spaz اجل انه اخرق Explication

The wog الشرق اوسطيين الحقراء Generalization

Don't look very sexy لا تبدين جدا مثيرة للشهوة الجنسية Literal translation

You are stupid انت حمقاء Literal translation

You're just too thick to understand انت ثخينة الرأس Explication

Fucking Jesus اللعنة Equivalence

Fucking تبا Literal translation

I'm fucked لقد قضي علي Adaptation

Don't be stupid لا تكوني غبية Literal translation

That coon ذلك الزنجي Adaptation

The conker الزنجي Literal translation

Tosser مغفل Literal translation

He should have gone for scum them and the wogs كان عليه دعس الحثالة اجمعين، هم،
Equivalence and Explication وشعوب الشرق الأوسط السفلة

Don't be thick لا تكوني ثخينة الرأس Explication

Liar أيها الكاذب Explication

You're fucking thick. انت ثخينة الرأس بحق الجحيم. Equivalence and literal translation

You're cruel انت وحشي Literal translation

Don't be stupid لا تكوني غبية Literal translation

You're a nightmare. انت كابوس Literal translation

Turning into wogland سنتحول الى بلد شرق اوسطي لعين Explication

Lot of bastard soldiers out there. يوجد الكثير من الجنود الاوغاد في الخارج هناك
Literal translation

Fucking accent انها اللكنة اللعينة Literal translation



What's a fucking Welsh, never heard of it لم اسمع بكلمة ولزي اللعينة هذه يوما

Explication

Mind your fucking own. اهتم بشؤونك اللعينة. Literal translation

Fucking beautiful اللعنة، كم هي جميلة Equivalence

Fucking bastard soldier جندي وغد لعين Literal translation

Funking bastards ate it all الاوغاد الملاعين اكلوا كل شيء Literal translation

We're all bloody hungry جميعنا جوعى بحق الجحيم Equivalence

Don't be fucking stupid لا تكوني غبية Omission and literal translation

Course you funkling do سحقا بالطبع تفعلين Literal translation

The cunt ذلك السافل Adaptation

Lucky bastard وغد محظوظ Literal translation

Stupid bastard وغد غبي Literal translation

In addition to the qualitative analysis of the translation strategies used in the translation of the taboo expressions and swearing words in this play, the study quantitatively investigates the data to find out the frequencies and percentages of the translation strategies of the taboo expressions and swearing words in this play. Therefore, table 2 is devoted for this purpose.

Table 2. The frequencies and percentages of the translation strategies in in Sarah Kane's Blasted.

No.	The Translation Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
١.	Omission	١	٢.٤٣%
٢.	Literal Translation	٢١	٥١.٢٢%
٣.	Borrowing	٠	٠.٠٠%
٤.	Equivalence	٨	١٩.٥٢%
٥.	Adaptation	٣	٧.٣٢%
٦.	Replacement	٠	٠.٠٠%
٧.	Generalization	١	٢.٤٣%
٨.	Explication	٧	١٧.٠٨%
The Total		٤١	١٠٠.٠٠%



The quantitative analysis of the selected data shows that, in the translation of the taboo expressions and swearing words in Kane's *Blasted*, the most frequently used translation strategy is the literal translation. The analysis of the data reveals that the high frequency of this translation strategy can be attributed to the fact that it enables the translator to preserve the meaning, tone, and emotional influence of the taboo expressions and swearing words in the target text. Moreover, it can also be attributed to the lack of euphemistic expressions in the target language that can make the taboo expression seem softer, while preserving the force of the original taboo.

The next frequently used strategies are equivalence and explication. The frequent use of these two strategies can be attributed to the fact that they enable the translator to balance the accuracy of translation, the linguistic and cultural emotivities, and the readers' expectations. Moreover, the strategy of explication can be used by the translators to make what is implicit in the source text explicit in the target one.

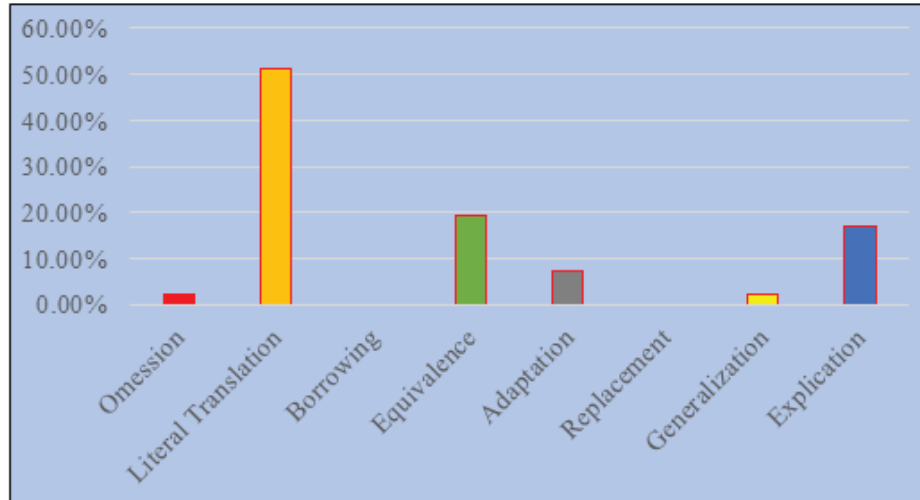
The less frequently used strategies are omission, adaptation, and generalization. The less frequent use of omission can be ascribed to the fact that omitting or not translating something from the source text to the target one can influence the tone, meaning, and the emotional impact of the latter. Concerning adaptation, it is also less frequent because the translator avoids the use of this strategy owing to the risks of misinterpreting the original text, or localizing it very extremely. As for generalization, it is less frequently used because using it might undermine the communication of the original text author's intention.

Moreover, the analysis of the selected data reveals that the strategies of borrowing and replacement are not used in the translation of Kane's *Blasted*. With regard to the strategy of borrowing, it is not used because of the cultural differences between the source language and the target one. Therefore, borrowing a taboo expression of swearing word from one language into another can influence its meaning, social weight, and impact. Concerning the replacement strategy, it is not used in the translation of the data under investigation because replacing a taboo expression or swearing word with diacritics can influence the translation by losing some of the intended meaning communicated by the author with the source text.

In order to explain the aforementioned percentages in a more comprehensible way,

they are visualized in the following figure:

Figure 1. The percentages of the translation strategies in in Sarah Kane's Blasted.



Conclusion

The analysis of the data under investigation reveals that translators recur to the use of some translation strategies in rendering the swearing words and taboo expressions in literary discourse, particularly drama. It is found that some of the translation strategies are used more frequently than others. Moreover, the analysis of the data shows that in translating certain examples of the taboo expressions and swearing words, more than one strategy can be used to convey the meaning of the source text properly to the target one. Some strategies are never used in the translation of the selected data owing to the fact of cultural differences between the source language and the target one. In addition, it is found that the swearing words and the taboo expressions in literary discourse must be translated to the target text even if they are culturally unacceptable, because leaving out some expressions from the target text without any translation can definitely influence the intended meaning of the source text. Furthermore, the taboo expressions and swearing words are sometimes euphemized through the use of some translation strategies such as omission or adaptation so that they can be culturally more acceptable to the target readers.

References

Abdelaal, N. M., & Al Sarhani, A. (2021). Subtitling strategies of swear words and taboo expressions in the movie "Training Day." Heliyon, 7(7), e07351, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07351>



- Ali, A. H, & Mewada, C. (2024). Investigating the pragmatics of swearing in classic English dramas. *Journal Educational Verkenning*, 5(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.48173/jev.v5i1.273>
- Debbas, M., & Haider, A. S. (2020). Overcoming Cultural Constraints in Translating English Series: A Case Study of Subtitling *Family Guy* into Arabic. *3L, Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 26(1), (4).
- Díaz-Cintas, J. (2009). *New trends in audiovisual translation*. Briston: Multilingual matters.
- Díaz-Pérez, F. J. (2020). Translating swear words from English into Galician in film subtitles: A corpus-based study. *Babel*, 66(3), 393–419. <https://doi.org/10.1075/babel.00162.dia>
- Goddard, C. (2015). "Swear words" and "curse words" in Australian (and American) English. *At the crossroads of pragmatics, semantics and sociolinguistics. Intercultural Pragmatics*, 12(2), 189-218. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ip-2015-0010>
- Goddard, C. (2015). "Swear words" and "curse words" in Australian (and American) English. *At the crossroads of pragmatics, semantics and sociolinguistics. Intercultural Pragmatics*, 12(2), 189-218. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ip-2015-0010>
- Hawel, Z. H. (2019). Strategies of Subtitling Swear words in *The Wolf of Wall Street* Movie. *Lark*, 3(34), 423–432.
- Kane, S. (2001). *Sarah Kane: Complete Plays: Blasted; Phaedra's Love; Cleansed; Crave; 4.48 Psychosis; Skin*. London: Methuen Publishing Ltd.
- Levý, J., althoff, g., & Vidal, c. (2012). |Translation as a decision process. *Scientia Translationis*, 0(11), 72–96. <https://doi.org/10.5007/1980-4237.2012n11p72>
- Ljung, M. (2011). *Swearing: A cross-cultural linguistic study*. New York: Palgrave.
- Lörscher, W. (1991). *Translation performance, translation process, and translation strategies: A psycholinguistic investigation*. Tübingen: G. Narr.
- Newmark, P. (1981). *Approaches to translation*. New-York: Prentice-Hall International.
- Sahari, Y. (2025). Rendering swearing across cultures: Arabic professional subtitles and fansubs of Pulp Fiction. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 12(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2025.2457222>
- Saunders, G. (2002). *Love me or kill me*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Venuti, L. (2017). *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation*. London: Routledge.