

THE CULTURAL AND PRAGMATIC ADAPTATION OF INTERJECTIONS AND SOUND EFFECTS IN ARMENIAN SUBTITLING: A FILM-BASED STUDY

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Abstract. Interjections and sound effects play a crucial role in rendering emotional intensity, pragmatic meaning, and cultural context in film. However, in audiovisual translation, also known as multimedia translation, and particularly in subtitling, these elements are frequently omitted or inadequately rendered due to spatial, temporal, and semiotic constraints. This study examines the cultural and pragmatic adaptation of interjections and sound effects in the English subtitling of Armenian films. Drawing on established typologies of interjections, the analysis classifies occurrences into emotive, volitive/conative, and allophonic categories and compares their application in the source dialogue and target subtitles. The findings reveal a strong case of omission, as in the majority of cases, the interjections and a significant number of sound effects were not transferred into the English subtitles, resulting in the loss of emotional coloring, evaluative meaning, and pragmatic value. Music and sound cues specific to Armenian culture were also frequently omitted, affecting narrative coherence and harmony. The article argues that, although in some studies, interjections are not traditionally classified as culture-bound elements, they function as highly culture-specific units in the Armenian language and play a greater and more vital role in subtitling practice. The study also highlights the impact of omission and proposes context-driven strategies, contributing to a more detailed understanding of pragmatic and cultural transfer of interjections and sound effects in audiovisual translation.

Keywords: audiovisual translation, subtitling, interjections, sound effects, cultural adaptation, spatial and temporal constraints.

Introduction

As a complex semiotic product, films not only entertain but convey culturally specific meanings, values, and worldviews to audiences, which are beyond national and linguistic borders. Films often function as a carrier and intermediary of culture, making film translation a key form of intercultural communication. Films are a coherent text in which narrative, dialogue, visuals, and sound operate together to construct meaning. As Kolker (1998) argues, any narrative the meaning of which can be abstracted from its structure is considered a text. Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007) describe films as highly complex sign-based texts in which multiple semiotic systems interact simultaneously to ensure narrative coherence.

From the perspective of audiovisual translation, film translation has a distinctive position within translation studies, as it is not merely a transfer but a mediation of visual and sound elements. While translation has traditionally been defined as the transfer of verbal meaning between languages, such transfer presupposes both linguistic and cultural competence. In audiovisual translation, this

requirement becomes particularly relevant given the interaction of spoken language, written text, sound, and image, each of which carries culturally specific meanings.

Films are therefore best described as audiovisual texts (Gambier & Gottlieb, 2001; Steckmest, 2021). This multimodality is especially relevant to subtitling, where spoken dialogue, exclamations, interjections, and sound effects are to be rendered into written form, considering the strict spatial and temporal constraints.

However, even nowadays, one of the most expressive and culturally loaded linguistic elements, interjections and sound effects, in film dialogue remains undiscovered. While major theorists (Barkhudarov, 1975; Florin & Vlahov, 1980; Newmark, 1988; Nedergaard-Larsen, 1993) have proposed classifications of culture-bound elements, interjections are largely absent from these frameworks. F. Diaz-Perez states that interjections, often considered minor linguistic elements, are disregarded in both linguistic and translation studies research (Diaz-Perez, 2023). This disregard is particularly evident in the case of the Armenian language given the frequent expressive use of interjections, especially in emotionally charged or conflict-driven dialogue.

Ameka states that interjections are morphologically invariable and syntactically independent units that encode subjective, pragmatic, and emotional meaning (Ameka, 1992). In audiovisual translation, they bring up a significant challenge, as direct equivalents are often unavailable or pragmatically inappropriate. Their translation in subtitling typically involves strategies such as omission, substitution, or contextual reformulation (Díaz-Pérez, 2023). Omission is particularly common, especially for primary interjections, resulting in a loss of emotional nuance and pragmatic force.

Similar to interjections, sound effects and music are quite often overlooked in subtitling. Baldry & Thibault (2006) acknowledge the importance of sound effects and visual cues alongside language in Audiovisual translation. J. Neves (2018) notes that sound effects are first and foremost for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH), highlighting why sound effects and music are particularly noteworthy.

This study addresses the cases of negligence of interjections and sound effects by examining their cultural and pragmatic adaptation in the English subtitling of Armenian films. Focusing on a film-based case study, it explores how these elements are treated in interlingual subtitling and evaluates the consequences of omission and adaptation for meaning, emotional impact, and cultural intelligibility.

Methodology

The empirical component of this study is based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the English subtitles of the Armenian films *“Lost and Found in Armenia”* and *“Yes Sir”*. The films were selected due to their frequent use of colloquial speech, expressive interjections, and culturally marked sound effects and music cues. The article also explores the evaluation of translation strategies applied in the English subtitles.

Analytical framework

The analytical framework draws on established typologies of interjections proposed by Ameka (1992) and Wierzbicka (1992), distinguishing between emotive, volitive/conative, and allophonic interjections. Each occurrence of an interjection or sound effect in the source dialogue was identified, classified, and compared with its corresponding English subtitle.

The analysis focused on:

- whether interjections and sound effects were translated, adapted, or omitted.
- the strategies employed in cases of translation or adaptation.
- the pragmatic and cultural impact of omission or substitution.

More specifically, a set of strategies, proposed by Díaz-Pérez (2023), specifically for interjections and sound effects in subtitles, is deemed more appropriate for the paper under study. He proposes:

- **Literal translation**, where the interjection is rendered with its direct equivalent in the target language.
- **Translation by a different interjection**, where the source interjection is replaced with another interjection that performs a similar pragmatic function but differs in form.

- **Translation by a textual fragment without an interjection**, where the interjection is reformulated as a lexical or phrasal expression rather than preserved as an interjection.
- **Omission**, where the interjection is completely removed from the subtitle, often due to spatial constraints, redundancy with visual cues, or limited semantic weight.

The Spatial and temporal constraints of subtitling, as well as synchronization were also considered, as these constraints directly influence subtitling decisions.

Results

Interjections

The analysis identified cases of interjections and sound effects in the film dialogue. The interjections under study were classified across three functional categories: emotive, volitive/conative, and allophonic. Emotive interjections were the most frequent, typically expressing surprise, indignation, or emotional intensity. Volitive/conative interjections served directive or interactional functions, while allophonic forms contributed to conversational flow and situational framing.

Despite their frequent application and communicative nature, interjections were mostly omitted in the English subtitles. Only in three instances the interjections were conveyed to the target audience through the use of a target-culture interjection strategy.

The table below presents the most frequent interjection forms identified in the film, their functional classification, the official translation, and the strategies applied, as well as the proposed translation and strategies:

Form	Type	Official Translation/Strategy	Proposed Translation	Proposed strategy
Արա' (x15)	Volitive / Conative	Omitted	<i>Bro, douchebag, man, hey</i>	textual fragment without an interjection
Իս / Իս	Emotive	Omitted	<i>Jeez, Whoa!</i>	a different interjection
Այ թե՛ր քան	Emotive	Omitted	<i>Holy shit!</i>	a different interjection
Ու՛ֆ	Emotive	Omitted	<i>Oh!</i>	a different interjection
Վա՛շ / Վա՛յ	Emotive		<i>Oh my...</i>	a different interjection
Հա՛ / հա՛	Volitive / Conative (rhetorical, conversational)	Omitted	<i>Seriously?</i>	textual fragment without an interjection
Ան հա	Volitive / Conative	Omitted	<i>Fuck!</i>	a different interjection
Ծիպ-ծիպ-ծիպ	Allophonic	Omitted	<i>Pip - pip - pip</i>	a different interjection

Below are vivid examples that illustrate how Armenian interjections carry nuanced emotional and evaluative meaning that is lost in English subtitles. For instance:

Ի՛, արա Բլի՛ն, իջցրա՛ էլ ժու՛նսալը, արա՛, իս՛:

(Lost and Found in Armenia, 0:10:35- 0:10:37)

Buldo, put it away.

19 ch.=S 3 sec.=S

The passage begins and ends with the culture-specific interjections “*Ի՛, արա... արա՛, իս՛*”, expressing emotive and volitive/conative functions. These interjections are crucial for conveying emotional intensity and providing insight into the speaker’s character. Their omission in the English subtitles disrupts both the emotional and temporal harmony of the scene. I propose rendering the first two interjections by **a textual fragment without an interjection**, with a shortened evaluative structure like “*What the...*”, given the contextual and communicative nature of the Armenian interjections. The following interjection is rendered into English as “*Jeez*” with the help of translation

by a **different interjection** strategy. This dialogue is accompanied by a sound effect, which is again omitted in the subtitles, but is crucial for maintaining synchronisation and cultural context.

Proposed translation:

What the...	9 ch.=S	
Hey, Bldo, put that shit away.	30 ch.=S	3 sec.=S
♪ Rabis song: Desert sun♪	24 ch.=S	3 sec.=S

- *Իս*, գնացե՛ք ձեր տներով
- Բա չիմանա՞նք ինչ ա ստեղ կատարվում:
- *Այ թեղ բան...*
- Ժողով՛ւրդ ջան, աշխատանքներն ընթանում են իրենց բնականոն հունով:
(*Lost and Found in Armenia, 0:21:17-0:21:25*)

Go home!	9 ch.=S	
-Let us know what's going on here.	34 ch.=S	3 sec.=S
Don't worry everything is rolling along, just fine.	39ch.=S+2	
	10 ch.=S	4sec.=S

In the above-mentioned examples, two cultural interjections expressing emotive and volitive/conative functions (*Իս* and *Այ թեղ բան*) are omitted in the English version, resulting in a loss of evaluative tone. The proposed translation for “*Իս*” is “**Jeez!**”, and “*Այ թեղ բան*” as “**Holy shit!**” through **translating by different (target) interjection strategy** to preserve emotional intensity, alongside appropriate situational reproduction strategies for synchronization.

Proposed translation:

Jeez! Go home!	14 ch.=S	2 sec.=S
Let us know what's going on here.	34 ch.=S	2 sec.=S
Holy shit!	10ch.=S	1 sec.=S
Come on, folks!	15 ch.=S	
Things are rolling along just fine.	35 ch.=S	3 sec.=S

Sound Effects

Sound effects, along with visual elements, are essential for transmitting cultural and narrative meaning, particularly for audiences with hearing impairments or language learners. In the film studied, loud or comic sound effects were frequently omitted, which disrupted the viewing experience and reduced accessibility. Examples include:

- [chuckles]
- [toilet flushing]
- [tuning the radio]

Most frequently met music cues also play a significant role in conveying cultural and emotional context. In the films, culturally loaded music, such as **Rabis** music, was not properly indicated in the subtitles. Best practices for subtitling music include:

- Using music note symbols (♪) to indicate songs
- Explicitly naming culturally significant tracks, e.g., | **[Rabis music]**

These strategies help preserve both the cultural meaning and narrative harmony, ensuring viewers can fully experience the audiovisual context.

A total of 27 sound effects were identified as relevant to narrative coherence, synchronisation, or cultural meaning. These included environmental sounds, comic effects, and musical cues. In the majority of cases, sound effects were omitted entirely from the subtitles, even when they lasted several seconds or played a clear narrative role.

Culturally significant music was not consistently indicated in the subtitles. The absence of music cues reduced the accessibility of the film for viewers with hearing impairments and weakened the cultural framing of scenes in which music contributed to characterisation or atmosphere.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that interjections, although rarely classified as culture-bound elements in translation theory, function as highly culture-specific units in Armenian film context.

Their omission in English subtitles results in a loss of emotional intensity, evaluative meaning, and pragmatic nuance. In several scenes, the absence of interjections disrupts the temporal and emotional harmony between speech, gesture, and visual action, hindering the character portrayal and interactional dynamics.

Numerous cases of omission in the provided translation as a translation strategy reflect both technical constraints and an underestimation of the communicative value of interjections. While spatial and temporal limitations are inherent to subtitling, the analysis suggests that selective adaptation or substitution could preserve key pragmatic functions without overloading the subtitle space. The most frequently applied strategies, such as by a textual fragment without an interjection or by a different interjection, and no application of the literal translation strategy, attest to the difference between the two languages and cultures.

Sound effects and music cues present similar challenges. Their omission not only affects narrative coherence but also undermines accessibility, particularly for viewers who rely on subtitles to perceive auditory information. Indicating sound effects for limited durations and explicitly naming culturally loaded music can enhance synchronization and preserve the multimodal integrity of the film.

Overall, the results indicate that interjections and sound effects have a crucial role and position at the intersection of language, emotion, and culture. Their treatment in subtitling requires greater theoretical recognition and more consistent practical strategies.

Conclusions

This study has shown that interjections and sound effects play a significant role in Armenian film subtitling. Although not traditionally classified as culture-bound elements, interjections accounted for 23% of all culturally marked expressions identified in the film and were overwhelmingly omitted in English subtitles. This omission leads to a systematic loss of pragmatic meaning and emotional depth.

Sound effects and music cues were likewise frequently excluded, disrupting the harmony, narrative coherence and accessibility. The findings suggest that aligning subtitling strategies with functional typologies of interjections and adopting standardised approaches to sound-effect representation can largely improve cultural and pragmatic transfer.

By highlighting the significance of these often-neglected elements, this study contributes to a more detailed understanding of audiovisual translation and emphasises the need to reconsider the status of interjections and sound effects within subtitling theory and practice.

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