Practical Functional Approach to Quality Assessment in Subtitling: 
*Pocahontas II – Case Study*

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Abstract  
The present research work deals with subtitling errors encountered by simulators and proof-readers. The resultant work is of significant contribution to problem decision makings in the field of quality assessment of audiovisual translation (AVT). The outcome of this paper is the result of accumulated working experience in this domain. The relevant errors are related to syntax, spelling, style, length of sentences, lack of clarity, and gender-related issues. These errors though made by one subtitler who has translated the animation feature film *Pocahontas II* released in 2012, are still typical and therefore a thorough investigation has been done and a set of linguistic rules has been suggested as a guideline for the audiovisual industry. These rules are to be added to the technical and software requirements sent by subtitling companies (such as the number of characters per line, the font, the reading speed per minute, and punctuation). This set of rules helps monitor the quality of the subtitled target text (TT).

Keywords: audiovisual translation, subtitling, quality assessment, practical functional approach, Arabic-English simulation

1. Introduction

It is taken for granted that the AV translator (whether subtitler or simulator) should have a skilful linguistic command of both the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). To achieve this, two skills are required: The linguistic competence which helps solve potential problems related to the shortening of the TT (due to both lack of space on the television screen and the limited duration of each subtitle), and the technical know-how relating to subtitling software. Simulation is an important factor in the improving the quality of the subtitling product in the industry. Potential issues in subtitling need to be resolved and decisions need to be made regarding the final product. Material adequacy has been achieved in this paper by highlighting the set of issues encountered by the proof-reader, known in the industry as the simulator, with special reference to English into Arabic subtitling of the film *Pocahontas II* (2012). According to Jorge Diaz Cintas (1996), ‘Simulation’ is a term known in subtitling industry and

Traditionally, subtitlers have been asked to perform one or all of the following tasks: to carry out the linguistic transfer between languages, to do the spotting – i.e. to decide the in and out times of subtitles on screen –, as well as to carry out the simulation, revision and quality control of the subtitles. (p.91) [my emphasis]

Diaz Cintas here has inadvertently explained what simulation is. It is common in the subtitling business to have both a subtitler – the one who does “the linguistic transfer between languages and then puts the TT on the screen - and a simulator – the one who revises the subtitled file along with its audiovisual material in order to see linguistically and technically whether or not the TT fits with the space and time on the screen. This is to improve the quality of subtitling. Muhammad Gamal’s (2008) article confirms how little research has been done in the subtitling industry, particularly in the Arab world; and this paper attempts to probe deeper into the simulation of the AVT, which is even rarer in the field of research. Special attention has been made to actual resultant practical approach of the authors themselves. It should be noted that this paper does not adopt any theoretical approach in particular suggested by certain translation quality assessment theorists from the 1970s to 1990s such as:

- Reiss’ (1971, 1981) analysis of the function and textual type of the ST and assessment of how the TT is verbalised;
- Wilss’ (1974, 1982 and 1984) view of analysing the aspects of the ST first in the identification step;
which usually have their own in-house subtitling/dubbing teams such as MBC in Dubai and BBC in London. These TV channels are the route to follow in the post-production of any high profile cartoon, corporate or feature films and documentaries. Material simulated by an expert often based in Europe or USA, in order to monitor the quality of the end-product. This is the first to get the AV material subtitled cheaply through the system of outsourcing – to reduce the cost – and then get that material simulated by an expert often based in Europe or USA, in order to monitor the quality of the end-product. But it should be pointed out that the focus of this paper is on subtitling and not dubbing, therefore no discussion will here on dubbing.

The number of subtitling companies in the Arab world is rather limited, they are mainly established in Egypt (e.g. Anis Obaid or VSI – the latter's head office in UK), Lebanon (e.g. SDI company), Jordan (e.g. Rosetta and al-Tanweer companies) and United Arab Emirates (e.g. television stations doing subtitling in-house). There are also few Indian companies which produce cheaply subtitled films and documentaries – as the rate of payment is relatively low in India compared to the rate of payment, say, in the UK or Europe in general. Poor pay is one of the reasons for establishing SUBTLE. 1

Another cost-effective way of producing a high quality end-product currently adopted by many subtitling companies is first to get the AV material subtitled cheaply through the system of outsourcing – to reduce the cost – and then get that material simulated by an expert often based in Europe or USA, in order to monitor the quality of the end-product. This is the focus to follow in the post-production of any high profile cartoon, corporate or feature films and documentaries done by production companies such as Walt Disney, Hallmark, and Discovery channel, or by TV stations themselves which usually have their own in-house subtitling/dubbing teams such as MBC in Dubai and BBC in London. These TV channels often rely on European or foreign companies to help them only with the simulation of the subtitled Arabic file – i.e. the simulator is provided with the subtitled file along with low resolution or definition picture. The simulator then checks and ensures that all subtitles are time-cued properly and that they all make sense and are not translated literally.

3. Subtitling basic rules

Before discussing the simulation of Pocahontas II as a case study, one needs to be aware of the basics of subtitling:

III.1 Word/character count and line count: Subtitling itself relies heavily on a number of elements, such as the number of words in one line of subtitles, and even the number of letters or characters in each line; characters include spacing and punctuation and which need to be considered too.

III.2 Segmentation: the TT needs to be divided into segments which are meaningful so that each line can stand on its own. Barbara Strang writes, “The ‘meaningful structures’ with which translators and interpreters deal are neither words nor sentences. They are units of meaning, which may comprise a number of words, or part of a sentence, or more than one sentence at a time” (As cited in James Nolan, 2005: p.45). One might add that ‘meaningful units’ are formed of phrases or segments, this is done by breaking each sentence into sensible noun, verb or adjective phrases.

III.3 Orthographically accepted word choice: Another element is the choice of words/lexis which ought to be orthographically acceptable at times in the style of the modern American poet E.E. Cummings, 2 that is, a

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1 Subtitlers in the subtitling business are poorly paid in a number of countries such as UK. This has led to the formation of SUBTLE, an association of subtitlers based in UK, but has members in many countries. Outsourcing is one of the reasons which have unfortunately driven subtitling translators to find another source of income. A few Indian companies outside UK now offer low rates.

2 Edward Estlin Cummings (October 14, 1894 – September 3, 1962) is one of the most experimental and innovative American poets in the 20th century, experimenting with poetic form and language.
subtitle might consist of only one word or even one letter. This is often seen when subtitling songs or educational programmes, in which an actor/actress attempts to spell a name or an address slowly. Here the subtitler can be as innovative in his/her style as is the American poet Cummings, e.g. to write the personal pronoun I as ‘i’. This is done so long as it does not violate the traditional English syntax, and might be taken to be a typographical error. So each subtitled line should be sound orthographically and syntactically. This needs to be so, unless the actor is intentionally speaking in incorrect English (e.g. an overseas visitor to an English-speaking country like UK) or broken Arabic (e.g. a maid who hardly knows Arabic and who works in an Arab country). Only in that case the AVT needs to reflect that feature or style of broken English or Arabic.

III.4 Technical know-how: the subtitler should master some technical skills – using some subtitling software confidently (wincaps, win2020, swift, and spot software) – and be aware of other software in the AV market.

4. Role of the simulator/proof-reader

The role of the simulator is to identify and correct major linguistic/extralinguistic errors which might be overlooked by the subtitler. Typical errors in AVT are related to phrasal verbs, wh-structures, literal/word-for-word translation, the use of prepositions, polysemous words, and typing errors.

When simulating a subtitled file, one might encounter another set of errors, not just that mostly common in paper or written translation. These common errors are related to TL grammar - numbers, duality, plurality, masculine and feminine dichotomy, and syntactical rules. They are also related to translation loss, word choice, word order, compensation, deletion, and perhaps the seven standards of text linguistics including semantic issues. All these errors are taken into consideration when subtitling. Admittedly, some of these errors might overlap with those encountered in other genres.

4.1 Confusing SL phrasal verbs with prepositional verbs

The rule is that the former has their particles moveable before or after their objects in the sentence, and the stress falls on the particles themselves; whereas in the prepositional verbs the stress falls on their objects. Laurel Brinton explains the difference between phrasal verbs and prepositional verbs, "Transitive phrasal verbs consist of a verb, a direct object, and a particle, which is movable, occurring either before or after the object (unlike prepositions which can occur only before their objects)" (Laurel Brinton, 2000: p.197).

1. ST: Thanks for dropping in.

TT1:³ Thanks
   For falling.

Also, note the orthographical error, one liner in ST and two liners in TT.

TT2: Thanks for your quick visit.

4.2 SL wh-structure errors

The double SL wh-structure as in statements: unlike English (the SL), the simulator and proof-reader should make sure to avoid the TL’s use of wh-structure in statements or indirect speech as they are polysemous in the TL such as ‘where’ أين in a question and مكان or ‘when’ متى in a question and حين in a TL statement. When there are two SL wh-structures, the first is the interrogative and the second is used as statement. In TT the subtitler might replace the wh-structure when it is used as a statement with its most appropriate equivalent: e.g. where = the place (or way or road, depending on the context) when = the time (the hour, day, months...etc. depending on the context), who = the identity. This technique is to avoid the confusion which might occur when two wh-structure are used in ST with two different forms, the interrogative and the statement.

ST: Who knows where I go from here?

TT1: Who knows where do I go from here?

TT2: Who knows the way I take from here?

4.3 Too literal word-for-word translation

That is when the TT does not make sense, and too literal translation needs to be avoided. One should be careful when using exegetic translation as Dickins (2002) calls the latter, (i.e. adding extra information for clarity) as both strategies used in the following examples produce awkward structures.

1. ST: - Pocahontas...
   - I wish I had her hair

³ Note that TT1 is the subtitled file and the TT2 is the proof-read file throughout this paper.
4.4 Subtitler being too engrossed with ST prepositions

This point is mention by Mona Baker in her book In Other Words (1992), and can be applied to subtitling or audiovisual translation. The subtitler needs to recognise the correct equivalent prepositions in TT, e.g.

1. **ST**: I thought you may need
   whatever power this holds for you.
   
   رأيت أليك قد تحتاجين القوى
   التي تحملها هذا لك.

   **TT1**: I thought you may need
   whatever power this holds for you.

   رأيت أليك قد تحتاجين القوة
   التي تحملها هذا لك.

   **TT2**: I thought you may need
   (to get) whatever power this holds for you.

'Power' is singular here, and the subtitler has made a mistake and put it in plural al-qwawwā.

4.5 Polysemous English words and their problematic equivalence in TL

The subtitler has encountered a polysemous lexis which might not be easily misunderstood, e.g.

1. **ST**: May I suggest she attend the Hunt Ball?

   أمكاني أن أقترح بأن تحضر جمعة الصيد؟

   **TT1**: May I suggest she attend the hunting ball?

   أمكاني أن أقترح بأن تحضر حفلة الصيد الراقصة؟

   **TT2**: May I suggest she attend the hunting club dance party?

'Ball' means 'a dance party' and not 'a ball for hunting'. The two words 'Hunt Ball' are in capital. This error is recurrent in TT1 throughout the film.

2. **ST**: It's a very good sign
   that you're doing so well

   إشبارة جيدة
   أنك تتميز بلاء حسنة

   **TT1**: It's a very good sign
   that you're doing so well

   إشبارة إيجابية
   أنك تتميز بلاء حسنة

   **TT2**: It's a very positive sign
   that you're doing so well

   Note that 'good' is polysemous as it can mean not just the antonym of 'bad' but also as 'proper' or 'solid'… etc.

3. **ST**: It's a very good thing Smith is dead.
   Seeing how disloyal your heart is
   would certainly kill him.

   إنه لأمر جيد جدا أن سميت قد مات.
   رؤيته تلقين الخانة كانت سئفتله بالتأكيد.
TT1: *It's a very good thing Smith is dead. If he were to see your disloyal heart, that scene would certainly kill him.*

TT2: *It's a very good thing Smith is dead. Otherwise you would have certainly killed him with your disloyal heart.*

Note compare TT2 with TT1 with the latter's awkward and rather unacceptable style (see further example in Item 16).

4. ST: Your Great, Good... Good Highness.

TT1: *Your Good Highness... the great.*

TT2: *Your Great... royal highness.*

Note, hesitation needs to be shown in the TL in the same way as that in the SL. Also, note the use of the polysemous 'good' (see earlier items about the adjective 'good').

4.6 Issues in referencing

Using incorrectly ‘pro-forms’ or referencing – co-reference, anaphoric, cataphoric and exophoric references. In 1992 Mona Baker wrote, “Anaphoric reference involves using a word or phrase to refer back to another word or phrase that occurred earlier in the text” (p.178) [bold in original] with cataphoric reference being the antonym of anaphoric one where a word like a pronoun is used to refer forward to another word), e.g.

1. ST: Listen to the spirit within.

TT1: *Listen to the internal spirit.*

TT2: *Listen to the spirit inside you. [or your spirit]*

Note it is common sense that the spirit/soul is internal; so, there is an error in meaning.

Note here that addition of 'you' is necessary to give the full sense of the sentence, as the word 'internal' is clearly unacceptable.

2. ST: You have your mother's spirit.

TT1: *You own a strong spirit like that of your mother's.*

Note that no one owns one's spirit. Here the word 'have' does not mean 'to own'; one cannot say, "You own your mother's spirit' literally; but 'your spirit is similar to your mother's". Also, in the context the adjective 'strong' is added to give the same effect as ST. But it is optional as you see in TT2. Note that even we are to accept 'you own' for argument's sake, the subtitler has made an error in TT, it should be تمتلكين التماثليكين not تمتلكي التماثليك. Although the verb 'to have' as proper verb and not an auxiliary means 'to own' here, it is important to note that parts of the body (e.g. eyes, hair, and mouth) and soul are not owned by the person but are innate and not acquired the way other objects are such as money, clothes, cars, and houses.

TT2: *Your spirit/soul is (as strong as) that of your mother's.*

Note that 'your spirit' is the closest in meaning to 'you have a strong spirit like that of your mother's'. It is obvious that the addressee has a soul or spirit, but that spirit is as strong as that of her mother. Note also that unlike English, Arabic must clearly differentiate between feminine and masculine; and the addressee here is a female.
2. **ST:** You were sent for the savage leader, and yet you bring back a woman.

TT1: *You were sent* to bring the savage leader, but you brought back a woman.

TT2: *He had sent* you to bring the savage leader, but you brought a woman instead.

Both TTs are acceptable here, it is just a matter of style. TT1 keeps the passive form which is used in the ST; TT2 uses an active sentence, which shows a translation shift, the reason is that the active form is more common in Arabic than the passive one, also it reads more easily because the passive form requires adding diacritics, and this task is laborious and often avoided in the media and the press. Basil Hatim's *Practical Guide* (2001) suggests repeatedly the use of the TL verb *تَمَّ* to avoid the passive form in the TT, and this technique is used above in TT1. Hatim rightly remarks, An agentless passive… would receive a slightly different treatment, though the passive contruction is once again avoided: *shall be construed* = *تَفَسِّير*.(p.31) This rule applies to instructional text type, but in expository texts "the 'َتَمَّ passive structure' would be most appropriate for the predominantly agentless passive in this kind of text" (p.98).

When the pro-form or back-referencing is vague, exegetic translation is required, e.g.

1. **ST:** It's beautiful!

TT1: *It's beautiful!*

TT2: *It is a beautiful necklace.*

Another example is this,

1. **ST:** And wait till he sees you after you're dressed
   I think the king will be very impressed

TT1: *And wait till he sees you after you're dressed*
   I think the king will be very impressed

TT2: *And wait till he sees you after you're dressed*
   I think the king will be very impressed with you.
The word 'dressed' is corrected in TL following a grammatical rule, and there is the addition of 'with you' for clarity. The feminine 'you' is used here in TL, but cannot be felt from SL (See Item 26).

4.7 Gender: Masculine and feminine
This issue is more problematic in the TL than in the SL, e.g.

1. **ST**: Wait till he sees you there
   in your curls

   **TT1**: *Wait till he sees you there*
   *in your curls*

   Note, imperative with the pronoun 'you' which is addressing a female, not clear in SL but must be clearly shown in TL. Also, note that no punctuation unless absolutely necessary.

2. **ST**: For now, my dear, enjoy the ball.

   **TT1**: *For now, my dear, enjoy the ball.*

   Note 'imperative' and 'dear' both are addressing a female. Also, note the polysemous word 'ball' which means 'dance party'.

4.8 Incorrect use of numbers in TL
Unlike the SL, the incorrect use of numbers in the TL with their corresponding nouns, verbs, and adjectives; having nouns and adjectives which correspond to numbers in the TL, where the noun and its modifier should correspond to each other depending on the digits used in the TL (Baker pointed out, “Determiners, adjectives, and sometimes verbs (as in the case of Arabic and Swahili) usually agree with the noun in gender as well as in number” (90) [my emphasis]. This grammatical rule has often no corresponding one in the SL with regards to duality and plurality in the TL that is not found in the SL. This grammatical feature is not as clear in the SL as it is in the TL); These nouns are seen when dealing with numbers and their modifiers in the TL, e.g.

**ST**: The strength of ten
   That's what I've heard

   **TT**: *The strength of ten*
   *That's what I've heard*

   Note compound nouns as in numbers have certain grammatical rules which the subtitler needs to be aware of.

Duality though clear in the TL but subtitles often produce rather inaccurate TT due to lack of knowledge in TL grammar. This feature is more explicit in the TL but not so in the SL. It is often unclear in SL the idea of duality, the way it is in the TL, so it needs to be expressed clearly in TT, e.g.

1. **ST**: You two might come to see
   You were meant
   to be so much more

   **TT1**: *You might come (in dual) to see*
   *You were meant*
   *to be so much more*

   **TT2**: *Each of you might come to see*
   *He was meant*
   *to be with the other so much more*
On the other hand, plurality of inanimate objects in the TL (Arabic) requires using the third feminine singular but not so in SL (English), i.e. ‘she’ and ‘her’ such as ‘these trees are beautiful’ = ﻣﻌﻠﻮMBة ﻣﺠﻤﻠéً ﻓو Arabic and not unless they are personified as in the world of literature, or in a cartoon. One needs to ensure the vast syntactic and lexical differences between masculine and feminine in the TL. There are many neutral inanimate objects in the SL, which are referred to in the TL either masculine or feminine, such as the word 'table' which is neutral in English but is feminine in the TL. Here are more examples about the issue of plurality in the TL regarding inanimate objects,

1. **ST:** But the spirits around me...
   Can help, but only the spirit within
   can guide you.

   لكن الأرواح حولي...
   يمكنهم المساعدة،
   ولكن الروح الداخلية فقط يمكنها أن ترشدك.

   **TT1:** But the spirits around me...
   Can help, but only the spirit within
   can guide you.

   لكن الأرواح حولي...
   يمكنهما المساعدة، لكن الروح بداخلك فقط
   يمكنها أن ترشدك.

   **TT2:** But the spirits around me...
   Can help, but only the spirit within
   can guide you.

Note that the pro-form of the plural 'spirits' is merely the feminine 3rd person singular in TT, i.e. 'her' [or the feminine form of 'it'] and not 'their', unless these spirits are personified. See earlier how 'the spirit within' is dealt with.

4.9 Appropriate TL collocational equivalence for SL expressions where possible

Collocations should be identified in the SL by the subtitler and then dealt with in the TL accordingly. Baker (1992) defines collocation in her discussion of ‘presupposed meaning’ as “semantically arbitrary restrictions which do not follow logically from the propositional meaning of a word” (p.14), and then points out that it can be looked at “in terms of the tendency of certain words to co-occur regularly in a given language” (p.47). But there are some collocation-related pitfalls and problems in translation, as Baker remarks (pp.54-63). SL collocation may be similar in meaning to that in TL but it is sometimes different in form. So the subtitler often faces difficulty with certain complex SL expressions or collocations.

Here are few examples regarding this issue:

1. **ST:** She seems so sweet
   She means us well

   تبدو لطيفة جداً
   وتتكلم عنينا بشكل جيد

   **TT1:** She seems so sweet
   She talks about us in a good way

   تبدو لطيفة جداً
   وتتكلم عنينا بشكل جيد

   **TT2:** She seems so sweet
   She puts in a good word for us (or Her intention is good towards us)

The expression 'to mean someone well' needs to be recognised before producing an appropriate TT.

2. **ST:** As if he never laid eyes
   on the likes of Pocahontas.

   لو أنه لم يرى تلك الفتاة بوكاهونتسا في حياته.

   **TT1:** As if he never saw
TT2: As if he did not see a girl
like Pocahontas in his lifetime.

The subtitle needs to recognize the two expressions or idioms 'to lay eyes on' and 'the likes of someone'. Also, note the adverbial 'never' as Brinton describes it (191) and this adverbial consists of 'not' and 'ever'. The error in TT1 is erroneously combining 'never' with 'in his life', the latter is obviously redundant; whereas in TT2 there is negation and 'in his lifetime' which works well together.

3. ST: A lady of grace
    from your head to your toes

TT1: A lady of grace
    from your head to bottom of your feet

TT2: A lady of grace
    from the tip of your head to the bottom of your toes

4.10 Negative/positive forms for the sake of shortening

The simulator is advised to use grammatical translation shift, i.e. using the positive form to replace the negation. This is done for the purpose of shortening, which is an essential method that needs to be adopted in AVT, e.g.

ST: The things they sell, the things I smell
    I never could describe

TT1: The things they sell, the things I smell
    I could not describe

TT2: The things they sell,
    the things I smell I fail to describe

More issues relating to shortening can be seen in the following examples,

1. ST: Say, I thought you
    were getting dressed.

TT1: I thought that you would wear the clothes.

TT2: I thought you would wear the clothes.

2. ST: It's just hard to say goodbye.

TT1: But it is hard to say goodbye.

TT2: But I find it hard to say goodbye.

3. ST: I think you must be a great king
    to have so many subjects, Your Majesty,
    and the loyalty of so many good men.
TT1: I think that you are a great king for the presence of many wonderful things in your kingdom, Sire.

And for the presence of many good men loyal to you.

TT2: I think you are a great king For the number of your subjects, Sire,

For the abundance of well-behaved men loyal to you.

Note that 'good' has many meanings in English, therefore its equivalence varies and this is based on the context, e.g. 'a good meal' (a proper or healthy meal), 'a good boy' (an obedient boy), 'a good restaurant' (a known restaurant), and 'a good sign' (a positive sign, see examples under Item 15).

4. ST: I've got something for you.

TT1: I've got something for you.

TT2: I have something for you.

Here are two more examples about the use of 'think' in ST and its most appropriate equivalence in TT,

1. ST: I thought you were dead.

TT1: I thought that you were dead.

TT2: I thought you were dead.

2. ST: I thought he was with you.

TT1: I thought he was with you.

TT2: I thought he was with you.

A further example of shortening is this,

3. ST: The least you could do is put a head on it. [i.e. the drink]

TT1: The least you could do is put some foam on it.

TT2: At least add foam to it.

4.11 Translation shifts from a passive clause to an active one, the former being the norm in English, but not so common in Arabic

1. ST: Which is the voice That I was meant to hear?
TT: Whichever is the voice that I ought to hear?

2. ST: Maybe he'll smile
   if he thinks he's allowed

   TT1: He may smile
       if he thinks it is allowed for him

   TT2: He may smile if he thinks his smile is acceptable

Note that the 'it' in TT1 is ambiguous here. Also, note that in English the elliptical style is acceptable in subtitling (i.e. he is allowed to do that); only when it is understood and there is no violation of grammar. Note how clear referencing is to the word 'smile' in TT2.

4.12 Technical errors
Here errors are relating to mirroring orthographically the subtitling lines, i.e. splitting but keeping the units still meaningful in the TT.
This technique is acceptable in subtitling when there are pauses in the speech (this style is similar to an extent to the writing of the American poet E.E. Cummings), e.g.

1. ST: Where do I go
   From
   Here?

   TT1: Which way for me to go
       From
       Here?

4.13 Captions in uppercase in ST but not in TT
Captions are sometimes written in upper case in the SL but cannot be done in the TL, as there is no capital letters; the solution is quotation marks will do instead, e.g.

ST: POCAHONTAS II
    JOURNEY TO A NEW WORLD
    JOHN SMITH

"بوكاهونتاس 2"
"رحلة إلى عالم جديدا" "جون سميث"

TT: "Pocahontas II"
    "Journey To A New World"
    "John Smith"

4.14 No homonyms in the TL
It is advisable not to use TL words with same spelling or pronunciation but two different meanings, e.g.

1. ST: Music and feathered hats
   and roofs that shine

"مسيقى وفيعات مزينة بالبريش"
"وأسطح براقة"
TT1: Music and feathered hats
and roofs that shine

Note that irregular plurals are sometimes homonyms in Arabic. The plural highlighted above can be mistakenly read as 'flatter' in TL. So use regular plurals, the ones that follow standard grammatical rule in Arabic, as in TT2.

TT2: Music and feathered hats
and roofs that shine

2. ST: Ten months

TT1: Ten months

Note that the irregular plural here is homonym, as it could mistakenly be read as 'more famous' in Arabic (cf. TT2).

TT2: Ten months

3. ST: Let her go back to Virginia
having witnessed the royal might

TT1: Let her go back to Virginia
having witnessed the royal greatness

TT2: Let her go back to Virginia
having witnessed the royal pomposity

4. ST: - There is no gold.
   - Another barbarian lie.

TT1: - There is no gold.
   - Another berberian lie.

TT2: - There is no gold.
   - Another savage lie.

5. ST: You and your people
are the barbarians!

TT1: You and your people
are Berbers!

TT2: You and your people
are savages!
6. **ST:** No. It's just a misunderstanding.
   It has to be.

   **TT1:** No. *It's just a misunderstanding.*
   *It has to be.*

   Here the expression 'understanding' is *fahim* (without its prefix morpheme) is a homonym, which needs to be avoid in Arabic.

   **TT2:** *No. It's just a misunderstanding.*
   *It has to be.*

   'Understanding' should be *tafâhüm* (without its prefix morpheme) as it is not homonym. Also, note the appropriate ellipsis used here successfully in TT1.

   7. **ST:** My word as a gentleman. Trust me.

   **TT1:** I promise you with this as a gentleman. *Trust me.*

   **TT2:** This is my pledge as a gentleman. *Trust me.*

   Unlike the ST, 'Trust me' in TT requires the use of correct TL preposition 'in me' and not 'by me'.

   The reason for avoiding homonyms in the TL is to avoid adding diacritics or diacritical marks, as they are confusing when they appear on the screen with a lot of action shots in the background, a technique often used in TL the TL newspapers, for words such as من which can be read as 'from' or 'who' depending on its position in the sentence, in order not to mix these two words, diacritical marks need to be added. However, one can use an alternative to the word من meaning 'who' by replacing its with a proper noun, e.g.

   **ST:** Then I will be but the first to fall.

   **TT1:** I will then be the first *who* dies from my people.

   It is advisable to avoid the *wh*-structure 'who' in the TT since it is used to form an interrogative structure or a statement. But the fact that the Arabic word is homonym if diacritics are not used (which is often the case as there is no time to add them to a subtitled text as they take more space on the screen). That Arabic word depending on where its diacritics are means either 'from' or 'who'; but diacritics are missing then it can be read to mean both words which is rather confusing. Indeed, subtitlers should avoid homonyms in TT, unless there is a pun intended in ST, and it works in TT the way it does in ST.

   **TT2:** I will then the first *victim* of my people.

   Note that the use of the word 'victim' is acceptable, as it is implied in the verb 'to fall' in ST; it also helps in shortening TT.

1. **ST:** Somehow I might find
   Who I am

   **TT1:** *Somehow I might find*
   *Who am I*
TT2: Somehow I might find
My identity

2. ST: I have found where I belong.

TT1: I have found where I belong.

TT2: I have found my home. [i.e. homeland]
The former translation is literal translation, and the latter is more communicative than literal translation.

4.15 Dangers of shortening by subtitlers, using substitution and pro-forms
This means shortening in TT but not at the expense of making sense or clarity, "trading-off between clarity and compactness" as de Beaugrande writes (1981). De Beaugrande in Chapter IV says about pro-forms and other elements as devices of cohesion "evince a trade-off where compactness might become so extreme" that they badly affect clarity.

1. ST: (King) I wanted him alive!
   (Army General) As did I.

TT1: (King) I wanted him alive!
   (Army General) Also, I.

TT2: (King) I wanted him alive!
   (Army General) And I did too.

2. ST: -You call this a party?
   -You're not having any fun?

TT1: -You call this a party?
   -Don't you enjoy?

TT2: -You call this a party?
   - Don't you enjoy it?

However, shortening should not be at the expense of breaking TL grammar, e.g.

1. ST: No, no, no, no. I told you I would
   meet with the chief and no one less.

TT1: No, no, no. I told you I would meet
   with the chief and no one less.

TT2: No, no, no. I told you I would meet
   with the chief and no one less in rank.
Only three no's in TL are used in order to shorten the TT. The comparative is unclear in TT, so addition is vital in order not to violate the TL grammar.

4.16 Subtitlers need to pay attention SL intertextuality
This can be seen in the well known expression ‘to be or not to be” Shakespeare’s Hamlet).

1. **ST:** - We'll rue this day, you wait and see
   - What is to be or not to be

   **TT1:** - We’ll rue this day, you wait and see
   - What is *to be or not to be*

   **TT2:** - We’ll rue this day, you wait and see
   - What is "*to be or not to be"

Punctuation is unnecessary unless it is a question mark.

IV.17 Deictics: Unintended vagueness in ST
This issue appears in the use of words such as 'thing', 'this', 'that' and 'one' - need not be conveyed in TT unless it is intentional, e.g.

1. **ST:** I will honor my vow not to break
   the peace with the pale ones,

   but we must know their strength.

   Cut a notch in this staff
   for every pale face you see.

   **TT1:** *I will honor my vow not to break*
   the peace with the *pale ones*,

   *but we must know their strength.*

   *Cut a notch in this staff*
   *for every pale face you see.*

   **TT2:** *I will honor my vow not to break*
   the peace with the *pale strangers*,

   *but we must know their strength.*

   *Cut a notch in this staff*
   *for every pale face of a stranger you see.*

Note the word 'ones' is too vague to use, as it can refer to people and non-humans; the word 'one' is similar to the word 'thing', which is vague too and needs to be replaced with a clearer equivalent.
2. **ST**: very stylish

   **TT1**: very neat

   **TT2**: Your style is very neat

Note that style is used to avoid ambiguity in TT.

3. **ST**: Don't let the savage get away with this.

   **TT1**: Don't let the savage be free (released) from this.

   **TT2**: Don't let the action of the savage escape punishment.

Note the subtitler needs to recognize the expression 'get away with something'. The demonstrative pronoun 'this' which is vague here, is replaced with a noun 'the action' for clarity. The addition of 'punishment' is required as it is implicit in ST and not so in TT.

4.18 Aspect

SL aspect might change in the TL due to context and respecting TL grammar, e.g.

1. **ST**: The High Court of King James will herewith commence.

   **TT1**: The High Court of King James will herewith commence to be held.

   **TT2**: The High Court of King James Is herewith now held.

Note the word 'commence' = 'be now held'.

4.19 Imperial Measurements and Metrics

It is advisable to convert SL imperial measurements to TL metrics, 'domestication' is adopted here, e.g.

1. **ST**: - Size 20 feet

   - How can you tell?

   **TT1**: - Its length is 20 feet

   - How can you tell?

   **TT2**: - Its height is about 7 metres

   - How can you tell?
5. Simulation Rules Proposed

Producing a cohesive, coherent and acceptable TT, both the subtitler and the simulator need to use one of the main techniques used in AVT, namely shortening or compactness while scripting the subtitled file. This technique is yet another constraint which the simulator and the subtitler need to deal with. Other constraints in AVT are spatial and temporal. They are related to timing and lack of space on the screen. The subtitler needs to be aware of the number of frames (pictures) per second in the video and the number of characters - i.e. letters, spaces and punctuations used (often 42 characters per line in Arabic or even leave the status as 'open', and that is not the case in European languages). These factors affect the choice of words, the shorter structure the better it is in subtitling. This is the rule. Such constraints or factors are talked about often in AVT by several AVT experts such as Jorge Diaz Cintas (2009, 2010) in Spanish subtitling, and Ahmad Khuddro (1997, 2000 and 2009) – particularly in Arabic subtitling and voice-overing.

Shortening, though the most common technique in AVT, has still its dangers or pitfalls which both the subtitler and the simulator need to be alerted to. Shortening or compactness sometimes affects clarity. Due to the lack of time, and as this paper is concerned with setting some rules which help the simulator, there is a number of checks that the simulator should do when proof-reading or simulating the subtitled file.

In AVT the lesser the better is the yardstick to use, meaning fewer words need to be used in subtitling. It is the golden rule for compactness when producing meaningful subtitles, but compactness should not be at the expense of making sense or breaking a TL grammatical rule. One should avoid using a TL word which can be read in two different ways, due to lack of diacritics (short vowels), e.g. ﻟُ드립니다 with no diacritics but if they are addition that word can refer to either the name of a city in Syria or ‘chickpeas’. Alan Cruse (2000) in his discussion about homonyms speaks about the word bank (money) and bank (river) (p.209). This difficulty can be solved in Arabic by adding diacritics to the homonym, but in AVT these diacritical marks need to be kept to the minimum, as they are calculated as characters and take space on the screen. However, in English homonyms can be understood in context. Technically related errors are those which are constrained by the spatial and temporal elements of AVT, such as leaving the subtitle too long on screen, or having it appear prematurely or too fast for the eye of the viewer. To the simulator should have the technical skill, which enables him/her to edit subtitles skilfully and competently using whichever subtitling software available.

The subtitler is always keen to enhance the quality of the TT. This can be achieved using shifts in negation for the purpose of shortening, for instance, the phrase 'not unclear' can simply be rendered as 'clear' (so instead of using ﻟُدراسائد ﻟَيذريديًا ﻓِي ﺍﻟَْادسة). This approach helps, particularly as both the subtitler and the simulator need to count the exact number of letters in each word and other characters such as spaces and punctuation, in addition to the number of words in each line of subtitling. However, one needs to ensure that ellipsis (as defined by Halliday & Hassan in 1976 as "the omission of an item") and substitution (defined as "the replacement of one item by another", p.88) in the TL are used only when there is no violation of syntactical rules, for the purpose of brevity.

The quality of AVT can also be enhanced when shifting from passive to active voice - the former is a more common norm in the ST (English), and the latter a more common one in the TT (Arabic).

Splitting the TT into meaningful units on screen typographically in each subtitle is a must, the way an interpreter splits sentences during the process of interpreting. Typographically speaking, one needs to ensure that all captions used in upper case in ST should be put in between quotation marks in the TT, as the TL never uses capital letters or capitalisation; and single quotation marks for italics as there is no italics in Arabic.

Also the choice of lexis in the TL is another matter which the simulator needs to pay attention to. The TL words ought to be chosen carefully, the way they are done in newspapers - words which require no diacritical marks. One should avoid homonyms, i.e. words which can often be read in two different ways, though they have the same spelling.

By the same token, only TL diacritical marks are absolutely essential to a word, should they be added. They are added only in order not to confuse one TL word with another orthographically, as the job of adding them is tiresome and time-consuming. So diacritical marks are not added in the TT, following the general approach in print, unless reproducing holy verses from the Holy Book (the ﺣُرَر). The reason for omitting diacritics in AVT is often due to lack of space on screen. Therefore, when choosing TL lexis it is advisable to avoid using problematic words, semantically, phonetically or orthographically.

It is also advisable to keep an eye on metric and imperial measurements, the simulator should keep in mind the acceptability of the audience or viewers, so ‘domesticating’ SL measurements in the TL is helpful to the audience and therefore preferred (See Khuddro’s discussions (1997, 2000 and 2009) – as the TL viewer would have a mental image of the distance mentioned, e.g. ‘Someone fell about 30 feet and cheated death’ might have this TL equivalence ﻣُنْسقط ﻣِنْ ﺑَعْضٍ ﺍﻟْمْسَلَة. ﻗُلْوُ ﻗَيْدَ ﺑَعْضَةَ ﻤَعْرَى (back-translation: A person fell about 10 metres and stayed alive).

Having discussed all these issues in AVT, one can suggest further rules to be followed:

1. Use translation shift technique from a negative form to a positive one for the purpose of shortening; also, use translation shifts from a passive clause to an active one, as the former is the norm in English, but is not so common in Arabic.

2. Mirroring orthographically, i.e. splitting but keeping the units still meaningful in the TT; this technique is acceptable in subtitling when there are pauses in the speech (a style similar to a certain degree to the writing of the American poet E.E. Cummings).
3. Captions when all letters are in upper case in ST need to be handled with care in TT which uses no capital letters at all in its language; perhaps using quotation marks is the solution here.
4. Confusing SL phrasal verbs with prepositional verbs; the former have their particles moveable before or after their objects in the sentence, and the stress falls on the particles themselves; whereas in the prepositional verbs "prepositions are unstressed" and the stress falls on their objects (See Laurel Brinton, 2000, p.198).
5. When there are two SL wh-structures: the first is the interrogative and the second is used as statement.
6. Choice of words in TT that require no diacritics, similar to the TL used in newspapers.
8. Too literal translation should be avoided.
9. Making style of TT more solid and compact.
10. Dangers of ellipsis and pro-forms, i.e. shortening in TT but not at the expense of making sense or clarity, 'trading off clarity for compactness' as de Beaugrande writes (1981).
11. No homonyms, never use TL words with same spelling or pronunciation but two different meanings.
12. Appropriate collocational equivalence for SL expressions where possible.
13. SL intertextuality in the TT, as in ‘to be or not to be” (Shakespeare’s Hamlet)
14. Translation shifts from/to negation in TT.
15. Being too engrossed with ST prepositions to recognise the correct equivalent prepositions in TT.
16. Shortening but not at the expense of breaking TL grammar.
17. Deictics, unintended vagueness in ST - i.e. using words such as 'thing', 'this', 'that' and 'one' - need not be conveyed in TT unless it is intentional.
19. Polysemous English words and their problematic equivalence in TL.
20. Grammar and meaning.
21. When the pro-form or back-referencing is vague, exegetic translation is required.
22. Duality: is often unclear in SL but needs to be clear in TL.
23. TL Grammar is sometime dissimilar to SL grammar.
24. Gender: Masculine and feminine can be problematic in TL.
25. As for Punctuation, the less the better except when it is absolutely necessary, as in the case of using a question mark, for instance.
26. Diacritics in TL are essential at times.
27. Typing errors in either ST or TT.
28. SL aspect changes in the TL due to context.
29. Converting SL imperial measurements to TL metrics, ‘domestication’ is adopted here.
30. Compound nouns as in numbers with their modifiers in the TL.

But the focus needs to be more on the following issues ordered in terms of significance and frequency as demonstrated in the chart below:
6. Conclusion

Simulating a subtitled file, one finds two sets of errors which need to be corrected: The first set is mostly common in paper or written translation, with errors relating to TL grammar - numbers, duality, plurality, masculine and feminine discrepancy, syntactical rules, and lexis - translation loss, word choice, word order, compensation, addition and deletion, and the seven standards of text linguistics as well as semantic issues. The other set of errors is particular only to AVT, it includes shortening and compactness as letters and words are counted on screen, ellipsis where necessary, errors in time-cues and other technical software issues and to avoid homonyms and other orthographically or phonologically similar words that might be confusing to read by the viewer, and finally converting imperial to metric measurements in order to help the viewer get the message and effect quickly and most efficiently.

To conclude, the elements that are problematic in AVT are related to syntax, semantics and lexical issues. For instance, the simulator needs to be alert to homonyms in the TT – that is, “two different words which happened to have the same formal properties (phonological and graphic)” (Alan Cruse, 2000: p.209). So they are words with the same spelling or pronunciation but semantically dissimilar in the TT, Arabic in this case. To illustrate such issues, examples are taken from one or two cartoon films (Pocahontas I & II), the latter is released in 2012. These issues are by no means limited to these two films but can be applied to other subtitled films and documentaries too, as they are quite recurrent in AVT.

References