
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cinema Translation and Intercultural Dialogue: A Pathway to Global Understanding

Sara El Jemli¹ ✉ and Imane Jai Lamimi²

¹²Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Euromed University of Fes, Morocco

Corresponding Author: Sara El Jemli, **E-mail:** s.eljemli@ueuromed.org

ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between cinema, translation, and intercultural communication. It explores how cinema acts as a medium for cultural exchange, fostering understanding across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Through audiovisual translation, particularly subtitling and dubbing, films become accessible to global audiences, bridging diverse cultural identities. The paper reviews the evolution of translation theories, from literal approaches to intercultural methods. It highlights the challenges of conveying cultural expressions and nuances in subtitles, emphasizing the translator's role as both a linguistic and cultural mediator. The study advocates for intercultural competence in translation to improve dialogue and reduce cultural misunderstandings in an increasingly globalized world.

KEYWORDS

Cinema translation, Cultural exchange, Globalization, Intercultural communication, Translator's role.

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1. Introduction

The journey of translation, as we understand it today, originates from ancient concepts and metaphors such as the Tower of Babel. This image symbolizes both the fragmentation of languages and the historical need for translation to bridge cultural and linguistic divides. Initially, translation was largely "word-for-word," where the process focused on conveying the literal meaning of words due to limited linguistic understanding (Steiner, 1975). This approach, however, often failed to communicate the depth and cultural context of the original message.

A shift in translation philosophy toward a more interpretative approach began with Cicero, who argued for a 'sense-for-sense' approach, emphasizing the importance of capturing the essence of the text rather than its literal form. Cicero stated, "I did not consider it necessary to render every word with a word... and yet I have preserved intact the essential meaning and value of all the words" (Cicero, 2006). His method inspired future translators to focus on meaning, allowing for greater flexibility and cultural nuance. This idea was further advanced by Saint Jerome (c. 347–420 AD), who translated the Bible from Greek to Latin, prioritizing fidelity to meaning over strict adherence to wording. As Petrilli (2000) notes, Saint Jerome's work demonstrates the value of maintaining the integrity of the source text while adapting it to the cultural context of the target language.

The Renaissance era marked a significant transformation in translation practices, driven by the emergence of national languages and the need for accessible knowledge exchange. Martin Luther (1530), one of the period's notable translators, emphasized the importance of adapting texts into the vernacular, asserting that "the exclusive respect of the words in the Latin text kills the meaning and kills the German language." His translation of the Bible into German highlighted the cultural and communicative function of translation, advocating that texts be rendered in the native language of the reader for true understanding. This period also introduced the concept of "belle infidèle" a term coined by Gilles Ménage (17th century) to criticize translations that, while aesthetically pleasing, strayed too far from the original meaning.

The 20th century brought significant developments in translation theory, with various scholars and linguists contributing new frameworks. In the 1950s and 1960s, translation began to be viewed as a science, influenced by the rise of computerized translation technologies. Researchers like Vinay and Darbelnet (1958) approached translation through a linguistic lens, identifying seven key procedures: borrowing, calque, literal translation, equivalence, modulation, adaptation, and transposition. Roman Jakobson expanded this linguistic approach by introducing three categories of translation: endolingual (within the same language), interlingual (between languages), and intersemiotic (between sign systems), highlighting the interpretative nature of translation (Jakobson, 1966).

This period also saw the rise of dynamic equivalence, a theory championed by Eugene Nida, (1964) who argued that translation should produce an equivalent effect on the target audience as it would on the original readers. Nida emphasized content over form, suggesting that translation's purpose was to communicate meaning in a way that resonated with the target culture. As translation theories diversified, it became evident that a purely linguistic approach was insufficient, and scholars like James Holmes (1988) advocated for translation as an independent discipline under the term "Translation Studies." This field broadened translation to include cultural aspects, recognizing translation as an essential tool for cross-cultural communication.

Jurij Lotman (1977), inspired by the Tel Aviv School (notably Gideon Toury and Itamar Even-Zohar), emphasized the contextual nature of texts, asserting that "the text in general does not exist in itself; it is inevitably included in a context." (p. 21). This perspective underscores the significance of situational and cultural factors in translation, requiring translators to choose methods appropriate for each context. In intercultural communication, translation serves as a means to convey cultural elements, enabling readers to encounter new cultural concepts outside their own experience. Roman Jakobson (1959), describing translation as an "act of communication", further reinforces this idea by highlighting the translator's role in interpreting linguistic signs across cultural boundaries.

As translation evolved, so did the concept of cultural translation, which aims to preserve and share the cultural heritage, traditions, and beliefs of different civilizations. In this framework, translators are not only linguistic converters but also cultural mediators, promoting dialogue between different groups. This development paved the way for intercultural translation, defined as a discipline that facilitates peaceful cultural exchange by resolving potential conflicts between diverse cultures. Unlike interlingual translation, intercultural translation seeks to mediate not just between languages but between entire cultural systems, bridging the distance between societies with different histories, customs, and traditions.

Becoming an effective intercultural translator requires a strong grounding in intercultural communication. As scholars have pointed out, understanding cultural context is essential for producing translations that resonate with the target audience. This involves not only language proficiency but also a deep awareness of societal values, beliefs, and practices. In doing so, translators can promote mutual understanding and bridge cultural divides, ensuring that translated texts remain true to the original while also being relevant and impactful in the new cultural context.

In summary, translation has evolved from simple linguistic conversion into a dynamic field that incorporates cultural and communicative elements. This development, from Cicero's sense-based approach to modern intercultural translation, highlights translation's growing role as a tool for cross-cultural dialogue, fostering understanding and connections across diverse cultures and contributing to a more interconnected world.

2. The Value of Translation in Intercultural Communication

2.1 Translation and Culture Relationship

Historically, translation primarily focused on linguistic transfer, but since the late 20th century, it has increasingly incorporated cultural considerations. As globalization expanded and national identities became more distinct, many societies sought access to information in their own languages, leading to a rise in multilingualism and translation activities. Language, once viewed in isolation, is now recognized as an integral part of culture. Snell-Hornby (1995) emphasizes this, stating that "language is not seen as an isolated phenomenon suspended in a vacuum but as an integral part of culture." (p. 39).

Scholars such as Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere introduced a cultural perspective to translation studies with their concept of the "cultural turn," which highlights how translation is shaped by cultural and social contexts (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1998). This shift led to the notion of "rewriting," where translation is seen as an act of interculturality, adapting messages to the target culture through negotiation. Umberto Eco illustrates this with an example: translating the English phrase "it's raining cats and dogs" into Italian requires adaptation to prevent misinterpretation, as a literal translation would fail to convey the intended meaning (Eco, 2003).

The Tel Aviv School, represented by Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury, further developed the “Polysystem Theory,” proposing that literature is part of a complex cultural system. In a stable system, dominant models influence translation, whereas an unstable system adopts elements from foreign cultures (Even-Zohar, 1978). This theory underlines that translators must consider the cultural stability of the target society and the degree to which it tolerates or resists foreign elements. In this way, polysystem theory positions translators as cultural negotiators who adapt texts based on the sociocultural context.

2.2 The Role of the Translator

The translator’s task is complex and requires adapting content based on the cultural sensitivity of the audience, which can vary significantly across societies. Walter Benjamin argued that translators should strive to uncover the “pure language” within texts rather than merely remaining faithful to the original, suggesting that translation is an interpretative act rather than an exact replication (Benjamin, 2001). Different translators may adopt different strategies: some prioritize accurately conveying the source language’s content, while others focus on ensuring clear and accessible communication. This underscores the translator’s need for flexibility and their role in balancing fidelity with the target audience’s comprehension.

Umberto Eco highlights the complexity of this task, emphasizing that translators must navigate various challenges, such as preserving meaning without distorting the author’s intent (Eco, 2016). Nida’s distinction between “formal” and “dynamic” equivalence further clarifies this dual responsibility: while formal equivalence closely mirrors the original text, dynamic equivalence prioritizes a sense-for-sense approach to achieve a similar effect on the target audience (Nida, 1964). This distinction is particularly relevant in intercultural translation, as it enables translators to select an approach that best aligns with the cultural and communicative objectives of the translation.

2.3 Communicative Competence of the Translator

For a translator to effectively bridge cultural divides, they must develop strong communicative skills that encompass both verbal and nonverbal language elements. Communicative competence extends beyond linguistic fluency; it involves the ability to interpret situational cues and adapt communication styles based on cultural contexts. Dell Hymes’ model of communicative competence identifies key aspects such as tone of voice, body language, and interpersonal distance, all of which play a crucial role in managing intercultural interactions (Hymes in Balboni, 2013). Similarly, Caon expands this concept by emphasizing additional skills, including observation, relativization, suspension of judgment, active listening, emotional intelligence, and the negotiation of meanings (Caon, 2015).

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions further highlight how factors like power distance, individualism, and uncertainty avoidance influence intercultural communication. Translators must be mindful of these dimensions to adapt their approach according to societal norms. For instance, in societies with high power distance, communication may need to be more formal, while individualistic cultures may value direct and personal messaging (Hofstede, 1980).

2.4 The Bicultural Translator

An ideal translator for intercultural contexts is often described as bicultural. Snell-Hornby (1995) argues that translators must be proficient in two languages and “at home in two cultures” to accurately convey the source text’s meaning within the target culture. Bicultural translators possess the ability to shift perspectives and seamlessly interact within both cultural frameworks. However, as Castiglioni notes, effective biculturalism involves a process of self-questioning and adaptation, allowing the translator to reconcile differing cultural values (Castiglioni, 2005).

Biculturalism does not automatically ensure success in translation, as translators’ familiarity with cultures varies. Those who experience “constructive marginality” effectively leverage their bicultural position, using it as an asset in intercultural mediation. In contrast, those experiencing “encapsulated marginality” may feel alienated and struggle with cultural integration, which can hinder their ability to translate effectively (Bennett in Castiglioni, 2016). Translators with a constructive outlook tend to adapt positively, acting as facilitators between cultures.

2.5 The Intercultural Linguistic Mediator

The translator’s role can extend beyond linguistic transfer to that of a cultural mediator, who not only translates language but also navigates cultural nuances and bridges understanding between groups. This role emerged in France and Italy to assist immigrants in integrating into new societies. David Katan describes the mediator’s responsibilities as going beyond literal translation to interpreting “expressions, intentions, perceptions, and mutual expectations” (Katan, 2004). According to Taft, the mediator must possess language proficiency, cultural knowledge, and the ability to mediate social contexts (Taft, 1981).

The intercultural mediator serves as a neutral party, fostering understanding while respecting cultural differences. This position is especially valuable in settings like healthcare, education, and legal services, where mediators interpret not just language but also

culturally specific behaviors and values. Modern mediators, as Kaunzner (2005) notes, need diverse skills: linguistic, translation, cultural, intercultural, communication, and social skills. These competencies enable them to interpret the full spectrum of verbal and nonverbal communication across cultural boundaries.

Translation today is more than a linguistic act; it is an intercultural process that requires translators to navigate cultural nuances, adopt appropriate communicative styles, and mediate between distinct societal values. As intercultural mediators, translators facilitate global communication, fostering mutual understanding in an increasingly interconnected world. Balboni and Caon (2014) underscore that intercultural competence does not require one to abandon their values but rather to appreciate cultural differences, respect diverse histories, and question inherited cultural models.

In summary, translation plays an indispensable role in intercultural communication by enabling meaningful exchanges and bridging cultural divides. By developing both linguistic and intercultural competencies, translators contribute to a world where diverse perspectives can coexist and dialogue can transcend boundaries.

3. The Role of Cinema in Intercultural Communication

Cinema plays a significant role in promoting cultural exchange, allowing audiences to explore new cultures, traditions, and societal issues from around the world. Since its inception by the Lumière brothers in 1895, cinema has transformed from silent films with simple title cards to a medium that reflects cultural, political, and social dynamics. Early Hollywood films, especially with the advent of sound, became dominant in global cinema, establishing the U.S. film industry's cultural influence worldwide. Cinema has the power to shape public opinion and influence cultural perceptions, often perpetuating stereotypes or ideologies, whether through intentional propaganda or unintended misrepresentation.

Cinema's reach and impact extend beyond entertainment; it influences public opinion on foreign cultures and societal norms. For example, certain stereotypes, such as the portrayal of Italy as mafia-dominated or Morocco as heavily involved in prostitution (as depicted in the Moroccan film *Much Loved*), can reinforce superficial perceptions, affecting international views on these cultures. Thus, while cinema can bridge cultural divides, it can also propagate stereotypes, necessitating a balance between authentic representation and responsible storytelling. Films are often commercialized, and their success relies on conveying relatable themes or messages, but intercultural sensitivity remains a crucial aspect in film translation and adaptation.

3.1 The Emergence and Evolution of Audiovisual Translation (AVT)

The shift from silent to sound cinema created a growing demand for audiovisual translation to reach global audiences, especially as American films expanded internationally. Initially, silent films relied on title cards for translations, which were later read aloud by narrators in foreign markets. However, with the advent of sound, language barriers necessitated new strategies, such as reshooting scenes in different languages or creating "parallel films" with actors from the target culture. This approach, however, proved unsatisfactory as audiences preferred the original actors and voices. As a result, the industry turned to subtitling and dubbing, which became the standard methods of audiovisual translation.

By the 1930s and 1940s, audiovisual translation (AVT) was well established, with both subtitling and dubbing emerging as popular methods for adapting films for foreign audiences. Subtitling involves adding translated text on-screen, while dubbing replaces the original dialogue with voice actors speaking the target language. Each approach has its strengths: subtitles preserve the original voice but may distract the viewer, while dubbing provides a seamless viewing experience but can alter the authenticity of the original performance. The choice between subtitling and dubbing often reflects cultural and political histories, as seen in countries like Italy and Germany, where dubbing became dominant due to nationalist policies. Subtitling is gaining popularity for its economic advantages and its role in language learning, making it a versatile tool for intercultural understanding.

3.2 Audiovisual Translation Studies and Cultural Dynamics

As the demand for translated audiovisual content grew, scholars began studying AVT in greater depth, particularly its unique challenges due to the integration of language, visual imagery, and sound. Audiovisual texts are complex, as they transmit messages through both visual and auditory channels. Perego (2016) defines AVT as a process that translates dialogues and other text elements while preserving the original film's visual and acoustic integrity. Chaume (2004) further emphasizes that AVT must consider both the linguistic and semiotic aspects, as translation is influenced by cultural contexts and cinematic conventions.

Unlike literary translation, AVT must manage multiple sensory elements and adhere to technical constraints. Scholars have debated whether AVT should be classified as "true translation" due to the frequent need for adaptation rather than direct linguistic transfer. Despite criticism, AVT relies on established translation theories, with adaptations and reductions necessary to

maintain coherence with visual elements. Notably, AVT has gained academic respectability and now includes professional training, with translation quality becoming paramount as audiences expect culturally sensitive and accurate adaptations.

3.3 Cultural Considerations in Audiovisual Translation

Translation choices in AVT significantly impact intercultural communication, as translators often decide whether to domesticate or retain cultural references. The objective behind each translation affects its approach, with translators aiming to balance accessibility with cultural fidelity. For instance, some texts may neutralize culture-specific elements to enhance comprehension, while others maintain distinct cultural references to foster intercultural understanding. Cultural context plays a critical role, as translators must interpret the original text's cultural nuances, gestures, and idiomatic expressions, ensuring clarity without compromising the source material's essence.

This cultural mediation extends to handling non-verbal cues in films, as gestures, facial expressions, and symbolic images are often culture-bound and require careful translation to prevent misunderstandings. The growing influence of globalization has increased AVT's importance, as audiences demand authentic portrayals of foreign cultures, with scholars advocating for intercultural competence among translators. Successful AVT helps bridge cultural gaps by allowing viewers to appreciate cultural diversity and understand unfamiliar social norms.

3.4 Subtitling and Dubbing: A Comparative Analysis

Subtitling and dubbing serve distinct functions in audiovisual translation (AVT). Subtitling preserves the original audio while displaying translated text, allowing viewers to experience the actors' voices and original dialogue, but it requires fast reading. Dubbing, on the other hand, replaces the original audio with translated dialogue, offering a more immersive experience but raising concerns about accuracy and potential cultural distortion. Dubbing is also generally more expensive, as it involves additional professionals, such as voice actors, adapters, and synchronizers, making it less economically viable than subtitling, particularly for online platforms and low-budget content.

Each method has its advantages and limitations based on cultural and technical factors. Subtitling is beneficial for language learning, accessibility for the deaf or hard-of-hearing, and immersion in the original cultural context. Dubbing, however, is advantageous for children and semi-literate audiences who rely on audio rather than text. Diaz Cintas (2005) points out that subtitling has gained popularity due to its cost-effectiveness and adaptability, particularly in digital media. Both methods present unique challenges and benefits, and each contributes to the promotion or hindrance of intercultural understanding.

3.5 Quality and Challenges in Audiovisual Translation

The quality of AVT is essential in preserving the original content's integrity and ensuring a meaningful cultural exchange. However, the fast-paced nature of digital production and automation pressures quality, with AVT professionals often facing limited time, resources, and low compensation. Subtitling, in particular, is challenging due to space and time constraints, as subtitles must convey the essence of the dialogue within limited character counts and screen time. Despite these constraints, standards for quality in AVT have improved, with professional associations promoting best practices and quality control measures, such as those established by the *European Association for Studies in Screen Translation* (ESIST).

Diaz Cintas (2007) highlights factors influencing translation quality, including technical constraints like synchronization and subtitle duration, as well as linguistic issues like grammar and vocabulary. Effective AVT requires skillful negotiation between source and target cultures to preserve the original work's meaning, humor, and tone. Moreover, quality AVT avoids oversimplifying or altering cultural references, maintaining both linguistic and cultural accuracy.

3.6 AVT as a Tool for Intercultural Dialogue

Audiovisual translation (AVT) plays a crucial role in facilitating intercultural communication by making foreign cultures accessible to diverse audiences. As a complex field, AVT requires balancing linguistic and cultural fidelity with the technical limitations of subtitling and dubbing (Gambier, 2009). The choice of translation method depends on the audience's needs, cultural context, and economic considerations. By fostering cross-cultural understanding, AVT has the potential to bridge cultural divides and promote an appreciation of diversity. However, its success relies on adhering to high-quality standards and maintaining cultural awareness.

AVT is a vital means of intercultural communication, capable of both enhancing and distorting cultural representation. With the right approaches, AVT can facilitate meaningful exchanges across linguistic and cultural boundaries, allowing cinema to serve as a platform for global understanding.

3.7 The Role of Audiovisual Product Codes in Subtitling

Subtitling is a complex process that involves interpreting multiple meaning codes beyond simple language translation, including visual, acoustic, and contextual codes that contribute to the film's narrative and emotional tone. Chaume (2004) defines an audiovisual text as one transmitted through both visual and auditory channels, necessitating that subtitlers understand various codes to accurately convey the message.

1. Acoustic Codes: This includes the linguistic elements (dialogues, monologues) and paralinguistic features (tone, rhythm, volume), as well as musical cues and sound effects. These elements often dictate subtitling choices, such as using italics for off-screen voices or transcribing song lyrics to fit the rhythm.
2. Visual Codes: These codes encompass iconographic symbols, photographic details like lighting, and scene transitions. Translators evaluate whether these elements need explaining, especially if they risk cultural misunderstandings. Gestures, for instance, may have different meanings across cultures.
3. Other Codes: Subtitlers also navigate graphic elements like on-screen text, which they may translate as subtitles, and syntactic codes created by editing, which help maintain narrative cohesion.

3.8 Characteristics of Film Speech and Its Impact on Subtitling

Film dialogue, though crafted to appear natural, is scripted and meticulously edited, differing from spontaneous speech. Known as "prefabricated orality" (Baños, Chaume, 2009), this script follows certain linguistic conventions for clarity and coherence, allowing translators to avoid unnecessary complexity and ensure readability. Film speech's structured nature means subtitlers face challenges in balancing the written and spoken codes while preserving the intended meaning and rhythm.

3.9 Phases in the Subtitle Creation Process

The subtitling process is a meticulous workflow involving several key steps (Cintas, Remael, 2007):

1. Spotting: The spotter determines the start and end times for each subtitle, aligning them with the speech and ensuring synchronization with the visual flow.
2. Adaptation and Synchronization: Translators adapt the dialogues, ensuring the subtitles are concise while maintaining the essence of the original speech. This phase also involves setting the reading time based on visual cues and audience comprehension needs.
3. Review and Correction: A final revision stage identifies errors or inconsistencies, often conducted by a different translator to ensure quality and alignment with the film's tone and context.

3.10 Textual Reduction, Transformation, and Translation in Subtitling

Cintas and Remael present the necessary steps to achieve proper subtitling (2007):

1. Textual Reduction: Subtitlers often condense dialogue, eliminating less critical information to fit within limited on-screen space. Reductions can be partial (condensation) or complete (suppression), as long as essential meaning is retained.
2. Diametric Transformation: Moving from oral to written language involves adapting spoken language to a concise, formal style. Subtitlers avoid overemphasizing language features that could distract the viewer, especially with sensitive topics like expletives or slang.
3. Translation: Subtitlers translate from the source to target language with an emphasis on conveying meaning over literal word-for-word translation, given that the dialogue has already been reduced and formatted. They balance accuracy and cultural relevance to maintain the viewer's experience.

3.11 Intersemiotic Translation

Intersemiotic translation, rooted in semiotics, deals with converting one type of sign (e.g., audio-visual elements) into another (written subtitles). Translators must consider the entire film context, including visual and auditory cues, and strategically select what to translate to maintain narrative coherence (Jakobson, 1959).

4. Elements that Influence the Translation Process

The translation process is shaped by various elements, beginning with the purpose or "skopos" of the translation. The skopos theory, introduced by Hans Josef Vermeer in 1978, underscores that translation goes beyond linguistic transfer; it must serve a specific purpose, which dictates the strategies employed. However, while skopos theory serves well in general translation, it encounters limitations in literal translations where maintaining the original's formal aspects is crucial. Vermeer later collaborated

with Katharina Reiss in 1984 to refine this theory in *Towards a General Theory of Translational Action*, proposing a framework adaptable to all text types, where the focus is on the communicative function of the text within a specific culture.

The theory emphasizes the functional relationship between the source and target texts, taking into account readers' expectations, cultural context, and prior knowledge, which may lead to modifications in the target text. Paul Kussmaul (1998) highlights that "*the function of a translation depends on the knowledge, expectations, values, and norms of the readers of the target language, which are also influenced by the situation in which they find themselves and by the culture. These factors determine whether the function of the source text or passages in it can be preserved or whether they need to be modified, or even replaced.*" (p. 444). Kussmaul, underscoring the influence of cultural factors in determining whether to preserve, modify, or replace content during translation. Christiane Nord (1997) later expanded on this theory by integrating textual analysis, arguing that translators must not only adapt the target text but also thoroughly examine the purpose of the source text.

Vermeer and Reiss (1984) categorize texts into three typologies:

1. Informative texts that aim to convey factual information;
2. Expressive texts that focus on aesthetic and artistic expression;
3. Operational texts designed to persuade or influence the reader to act according to the sender's intentions .

Additionally, Osimo Bruno (1979) distinguishes between "open" and "closed" texts. Closed texts, like manuals, require minimal interpretation, while open texts invite the reader to engage in a continuous interpretative process, termed the "hermeneutic circle." This distinction emphasizes the translator's role in decoding the degree of interpretation required based on the audience's familiarity with the genre and context of the text.

The audience itself is another crucial factor, significantly influencing translation strategies. Nord asserts that the translation should align with the original author's intent but be tailored to the target audience's cultural context and expectations (Nord, 2018). For instance, in audiovisual translation, cultural nuances, gestures, and expressions must be carefully interpreted to avoid misunderstandings for foreign viewers unfamiliar with the source culture . Hatim and Mason observe that cinema audiences rely on paralinguistic cues, body language, and visual context, which translators must consider to bridge cultural gaps effectively (Hatim & Mason, 2005).

Moreover, the audience's sociological characteristics—age, linguistic knowledge, and familiarity with audiovisual genres—impact subtitle reception (Gambier, 2001). Technical elements also play a role; for instance, sudden scene shifts amid continuous dialogue require precise timing and placement of subtitles. Therefore, a subtitler, unlike a literary translator, must have a nuanced understanding of the visual elements alongside linguistic-cultural components (Petillo, 2008). Finally, Newmark and Gottlieb offer nuanced classifications of readers and viewers, identifying types based on their familiarity with the source language and subtitle engagement, from experts to casual viewers .

In conclusion, the translation process in audiovisual contexts demands not only linguistic expertise but also a comprehensive grasp of cultural dynamics, audience psychology, and technical knowledge to create accessible, culturally sensitive translations that fulfill the intended communicative purpose.

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ORCID

Sara El Jemli: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0797-5969>

Imane Jai Lamimi: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7918-4315>

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